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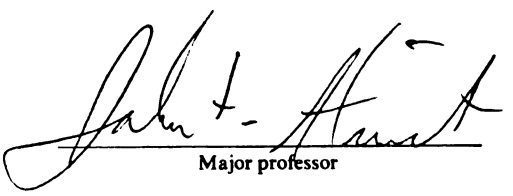

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# HEALING, PERSONHOOD AND POWER: A HISTORY OF WITCH-FINDING IN ASANTE

VOLUME I

By

William C. Olsen

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ABSTRACT

HEALING, PERSONHOOD AND POWER:

A HISTORY OF WITCH-FINDING IN ASANTE

By

WILLIAM C. OLSEN

This thesis challenges broad cross cultural comparisons by anthropologists of illness categories and of disease symptoms. In an historic setting (1879-1945), it shows that West African concepts of illness contained few elements of what is regarded as disease in a Western bio-medical frame of reference. Rather, evidence shows that illness and health were intricate aspects of personhood. Personhood and power were the basis of spatial and bodily folk models.

The specific topic of this dissertation is witch-finding, which began in Asante as early as 1879 with a cult named ɔdomaŋkama. This cult was part of a wave of medicinal and religious movements which swept West Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Cults in Asante emphasized healing and failures to conceive.

More broadly, the dissertation focuses on experiences of human persons, including motivations, dispositions, and intentions. It is argued that history is made at the level of human experience and creative uses of power, rather than at the level of abstract political and administrative institutions and structures of the state. Data was obtained from the National Archives of Ghana and other primary sources.

Colonial attempts to regulate the cults and to civilize populations are also

relevant. Within colonialism, cult operations are considered as forms of resistance, and therefore as human agency. In pre- and post-colonial Asante, witch-finding cults are viewed as local responses to historic conditions of change and discontinuity.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation has been created with the kind assistance of several scholars, archivists, and family. In Accra, Kumase and Cape Coast, I owe a great gratitude to the tremendous help of Felix Ampong and Edith Wood. Ampong aided with the National Archives of Ghana, and provided help in interviewing witch-catchers. Wood gave much direction in the use of the voluminous Archives, including indexing of files relevant to my interests. In Cambridge, Geoffrey Waller and Patrick Zutshi facilitated use of the massive Asante Social Survey archives and the papers of Meyer Fortes. Susan Drucker-Brown also guided me through some of the Fortes papers and added perspectives on witchcraft and divination from northern Ghana. In London, the staff of the library at the School of Oriental and African Studies provided timely and lengthy assistance with the archives from the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in West Africa. David Easterbrook and his staff at the Herskovitts Library gave enormous help in sorting through the voluminous Akan archives.

The thesis was improved by members of my doctoral committee: John Hinnant, Judy Pugh, Robert McKinley, Ken Lewis, and Michael Jackson. Various ideas were also reviewed by Pash Obeng. Chapter drafts were also read and critiqued by Steve Olsen. My wife, Vivian, gave her heart and soul to this project, not because she liked anthropology or witchcraft, but because it was mine. Our children lightened the moments over many years with their humor and welcomed ridicule of the "endless thesis." Of such things, indeed, is healing effected.

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Chapter I

Theories of Illness and the Person

## 1.1 Illness: Introduction and Theory

In this thesis, I shall demonstrate the central place of "illness" and power in Asante witchcraft and witch-finding. I assert that illness and healing were basic meaningful aspects of Asante movements of witch finding. Illness and healing were conceptually linked with pre-colonial cultural understandings of the body, itself a seat of power. Ritual healing of the body responded to suspicions of witchcraft. Therapeutic manipulations of the body through use of medicines served to both challenge and redefine power. Healing thus arose as a form of power in the pre-colonial state. This premise is evident by the predominant use of imported (Islamic) medicines by the Asante political elite. I further this assertion by claiming that power was assumed by participants of movements who sought to reveal witches and to nullify their nefarious effects on human persons.

Witch hunting may be regarded as a creative and mystical attempt to eliminate evil and illness and to eschew future occurrences of misfortune. In this process, Asante made sense of their lives in circumstances where modern certainties seem to have failed.

Healing and witch catching continued as forms of power during colonialism. English governors attempted general suppressions of indigenous healing when connected to witch finding. They were trying to create paper subjects if not loyal citizens. However, indifference to British administrative regulation and defiance in the face of legal sanction and threat of imprisonment display an Asante engagement in their own cosmology rather than in the practical realm of English law. Resistance by Asante witch-finders to comply with

colonial mandates erupted in both heated dialogue and greater demonstrations of political strength. Both reactions reveal various forms of power; and both also show that a culture of colonialism was permeated by power from two indistinguishable sectors of African society: politics and religion.

For Asante, power originated in the Asante cosmology. Power was limitless in character. Power in the Asante cosmos was potentially available to anyone. It was the restriction of authority structures which relegated the use of power to specific lineages or political authorities. This historical development is understood within the contexts of cultural expectations regarding gender, age, and stratification. Power to cause illness, as seen in cases of witchcraft, was illegitimate in every case. Powers to heal witch inflicted illnesses, as witnessed in witch finding cults, was a matter of negotiation, struggle and conflict. This power assumed a variety of forms throughout the historical record.

I will argue that witch finding cults were essentially forms of medicine which attempted to cure the body of illnesses caused by witches. These cults arose dramatically in the historical record during a period of enormous social and political transition. I will show that power of healing, formerly controlled only by the elite, was assumed by more common sectors of Asante society in the late nineteenth century. These restricted powers reasserted themselves when state authority became weakened, challenged, or abated. In a universe diffused with power, those who controlled healing and who revealed witches were perhaps the most visible emissaries of cosmological power. In the twentieth century, witch-finding became more routinized and lucrative as a profession. I will demonstrate that witchcraft, and ritual attempts to control its effects, concerned three central features of Asante cosmology

and society. These are, namely, the polarity between forest and settlement, the matrilineage, and kingship.

Historical documentation will be used to show the remarkable concern, even obsession, with using illness concepts to describe persons, events and relations between British administrative institutions and individuals within those institutions and the local peoples of western Gold Coast who they attempted to rule. Moreover, illness will also be seen as a mediating symbol, and as a token of moral and legal guilt in circumstances of witchcraft confession. I will further argue that where illness and misfortune can be attributed to human persons as the result of witchcraft, or where anti-witchcraft movements appear in an attempt to control witch induced illnesses, colonial relations of power became contested, challenged and refuted. The history of witch finding in West Africa was one of contest and resistance in relation to power. Power will be seen as a cultural and historical construct. It led to the presumption that images of power involved ideas about the nature of society, the nature of nature itself, and the nature of human actions. Thus, in Asante, contrary to Western conceptions, the source of power "resides in the interaction between natural, social, and supernatural realms." (Arens and Karp: 1989, p. xvii)

This thesis is a study of healing, personhood, power, and witch-finding situated in an historic setting in West Africa. An essential premise upon which this thesis develops is that "medical knowledge is socially and culturally variant, and that in part this is true because illness itself, the object of medical knowledge, is socially and culturally variant." (Good: 1994, p. 118) We must recognize, along with Bourdieu, that the body is used to signify continuity and discontinuity in social relations. (1977) We must also

acknowledge, in accordance with Foucault, that power can be created, as shown in the way that cultural signs, relations, and events are manipulated in rituals, thereby recreating the social order in the process. Again, power is signified by the body (Foucault: 1977) The period context begins in the pre-colonial era of the late nineteenth century. The first documented example of a witch finding movement in Asante is from 1879. Analysis continues during British rule through 1945 among the Asante and other Akan peoples in western Ghana, then the Gold Coast Colony.

Data from the research was gathered during trips to England and Ghana in November and December of 1994, March of 1995, and December and January of 1996 and 1997. The goal of this research was to explore practices of witch finding movements which were pervasive in the Gold Coast during British colonialism. The research also focuses on theoretical issues of power and personhood as manifest in ritual and medical practices. Ethnographic and historic backgrounds of Asante are provided in Chapter II. In this introduction, I outline the general theoretical approach utilized throughout the analysis.

The research which forms the basis for this thesis was inspired in part by certain perceived limitations of ethno-medical studies and concepts. These limitations were apparent during the formative period of the research. They continued to be so throughout the time in which data was gathered. While this is not the place to review a wide range of literature, some generalizations can be made which will place the research within a context of some larger concerns in medical anthropology.

The most common assumption of medical anthropology of the human condition is that disease is ubiquitous. Confronted with this reality, society must establish

recognizable means for coping with and remedying its insidious and destructive effects. The result may be considered as a medical system. Yet some anthropologists view this system as dualistic, wherein normative responses involving medical treatment are social reactions to strictly biological facts. Thus, Ronald Simons describes the latah phenomenon of Java as "culture-specific exploitation of a neurophysiological potential shared by humans and other mammals." (Simons: 1985, p. 59) This seemingly ecological and environmental approach to disease (e.g. Alland, 1970) attempts to describe medical responses as comprising a social domain which may be of comparative value both for its biological and cultural/social properties. (Simons: 1985)

Similarly, Horacio Fabrega isolates a "medical-care system" in any society which has adapted explanations of and responses to the objective qualities of disease (1976). Such responses demonstrate its "functional" nature. This medical model is based on an empirical tradition in medicine, which holds that the primary unit of study should be diseases or physiological processes that are "*external categories* of more or less *universal* reference." (Loudon: 1976, p. 38) In other words, diseases invoke individual and social responses, which are in turn formulated as ethno-medical systems. The biological basis of medical treatment thus triggers a set of cultural configurations and social practices which allow society to adapt (or fail to adapt) to disease via a strikingly Malinowskian construct of society-as-organism responding to its own need for health. (Fabrega: 1976, p. 116.)

Byron Good has noted how the bio-medical approach to illness resembles "utilitarian" theory in anthropology. (Good: 1994, p. 46) It may be identified with cultural models which are based on "practical reason." Thus, says Good, the description given by

Marshall Sahlins to such theories as Morgan's development of marriage may also apply to utilitarian approaches in medical anthropology. "The general line of force in the argument, *the orientation of logical effect*, is from natural constraint to behavioral practice, and from behavioral practice to cultural institution:

1. circumstance → practice → organization and codification (institution)" (Sahlins: 1976, p. 60-61)

In this utilitarian view of sickness, disease is often regarded as a natural object of biological content. Its representations are formed through folk and scientific thought. Its symptoms provoke individual and social responses, and these responses become known as ethnomedical systems. The medical model is based on utilitarian or practical premises, and claims that the ethno-medical component of society is essential in order to adapt to changing and diverse ecologies. "Culture, from this perspective, is conceived as a set of adaptive responses to diseases, which are here interpreted as analytically prior to and independent of culture, and medical systems are the sum or result of cumulative individual strategic responses." (Good: 1994, p. 41) The value of a medical anthropology from this perspective is manifest in the assumption that

> something similar to what the average person refers to by the term disease or illness in our culture is found in all societies...The phenomena referred to by them through their vocabulary of disease and illness is similar to the phenomena we label by means of our own. (Fabrega: 1977; p. 79)

Thus, according to this line of reasoning, illness and its ensuing medical attention can be isolated from other social systems largely due to its basis in physical reality.

(Bolton: 1981) As such, the medical system stands distinguishable from all other features of the social system. Moreover, physical symptoms are regarded as the cause for social conditions of response. Complex symptoms, or those discovered in a variety of social settings, may produce varied kinds of responses. Illness symptoms, however, are seen as cultural effects of biological causes. In describing the Latin American folk illness Susto, Crandon has said, "that there are innumerable diseases that can account exactly for all the symptoms of *susto*, for its usual pattern of symptomatic progression and for its extremes of variation." (Crandon: 1983, p. 158) By no means is this view limited to one writer, or even to one particular theoretical school. Across the Atlantic, the same position is argued within British anthropology.

> In delineating my area of study I am therefore assuming that illness, with its general, though varying, relation to man's biological basis, is on a priori grounds a distinct aspect of all people's experience. (Frankel: 1986; p. 2.)

In other words, "native" disease terms can be supposed to constitute relatively closed conceptual systems analyzable through a model of biological and cultural facts (e.g. Frake, 1961), or by virtue of their common ground in biological facts. This biological common denominator allows for cross cultural comparisons of medical systems. We can thus first comprehend the disease, and then understand how it is socially perceived. For this reason, Lewis notes, "I think we are wise to accept external biological criteria of disease and compare these with the concepts of illness which prevail in a particular society, rather than to depend solely on sociological definitions of illness." (Lewis: 1975;. p. 151.)

Good has written of this medical model, describing it as a "common sense" or "empiricist" approach to medicine. He claims it is distinguished by three criteria: the

analysis of illness representations as "health beliefs"which are themselves a sort of analytical common ground between popular medical culture and scientific knowledge, the adaptation of culture to perceived illnesses, and an analytic primacy of the rational, value-maximizing individual. (Good: 1994, p. 39)

One anticipated conclusion to this approach is the unity of mankind based on definitions of disease and the symptoms of bodily malfunction. Thus, according to this view, it is possible to measure the overlap between "native" disease terms and western categories for disease (Weller, 1984.) One can thus be led into:

> assuming that disorders of the body and mind have sufficiently common features in the sorts of undesirable discontinuities they imply for those experiencing them that one's society's responses to them can properly be compared with another's, and that both responses are in some measure referable to the knowledge of scientific medicine. (Frankel: 1986; p. 2).

Perhaps the most noted applications of this model have been made in studies of ethno-science, where comparative analysis is established around the manner in which diseases are mapped onto culturally formed classificatory schemata. Analysis rests on the comparison of one society to another regarding the application of cultural criteria to particular bio-medical disease symptoms.

This approach is taken by Tooth in his analysis of trypanosomiasis and its associated "mental abnormalities" in the Gold Coast in 1945. (Tooth: 1950) These mental disorders were the cause of supposed witch identities and of their assumed powers to cause illness, according to Tooth. The approach is also a basic component of M.J. Field's analysis of schizophrenia and depression among participants of medicinal and witch-finding shrines in the Gold Coast from 1929 through 1950. (Field: 1960) An identical approach to illness

concepts within Akan witchcraft and witch-catching movements of the early twentieth century is taken by the Reverend Hans Debrunner. (1963) These studies will be further examined below.

By contrast, the approach taken in this thesis is that illness and the body are part of the "meaning-centered" aspects of cultural and social systems. Arthur Kleinman has designated the medical system as a "cultural system." It is thus a distinctive field of anthropological investigation. Disease and illness, he notes, exist as "constructs in particular configurations of social reality. They can be understood only within defined contexts of meaning and social relationships." (Kleinman: 1980, p. 73) Medical concepts are thus "explanatory models" grounded in social and historical contexts.

Good has noted that the fundamental element of the meaning-centered approach to medicine is that "disease is not an entity but an explanatory model. Disease belongs to culture, in particular to the specialized culture of medicine. And culture is not only a means of representing disease, but is essential to its very constitution as a human reality." (Good: 1994, p. 53) "Disease" is framed as complex human phenomenon. These phenomena often have profound social and historical contexts. By this means, these phenomena become part of the meaning of medical practices and a medical system. Rather than belonging to bio-medical realities, disease thus has its ontological basis in the order of meaning and human imagination and creativity. I will argue that "interpretations of the nature of an illness always bear the history of the discourse that shapes its interpretation, and are always contested in settings of local power relations." (Good: 1994, p. 53)

One cannot deny the universality of disease. Nor can one deny the effects of

the biological and physical environment on health. But assumptions that ideas of disease and the systematic practices meant to alter its course and its symptoms will thereby be similar across cultures cannot be presumed on such a priori evidence. Differences in teleology and the apprehension of knowledge must also be considered. Moreover, ethnographic analysis suggests that a category of disease which resembles western biomedical constructs, and which may be restricted to a host of altered physiological and psychological conditions, may not be universal at all.

The assumption that illness concepts and their medical system form a distinct, separate and systematic conceptual domain by virtue of taxonomic properties is also doubtful. Devisch emphasizes this point in his analysis of Yaka healing cults in Zaire. He shows how the conceptual and relational networks which surround biomedical dysfunction comprise a wide range of cultural meanings. These networks refer to personal role performances which are otherwise unrelated to "disease."

> Illness and healing are multilayered realities. Contrary to current biomedical notions that view health merely as the absence of organic dysfunction, the members of Yaka cult and self-help groups in Kinshasa and the villages appear to interpret health and individual well-being as resulting from specific relations between people--or between the individual, the group, and the environment, or life-world--and results from the vital integration of elements which also determine the fertility of the social group, success at school or work, and the moral and material well-being or continuity of the family group. Being in good health therefore means being whole, that is, being integrated in a meaningful way into the relational fields of body, group, and life-world. Notions of sickness, illness and misfortune are related to this integrative notion of personhood and health. The interpretation of the meaning of illness can only be understood within the wide context of the forces at work in the social context and life-world. (Devisch: 1993; p. 31)

If isolating a medical domain with its own logic and comparative properties is impossible, then the pursuit of data which treats the ethnography of illness and healing

may be more appropriately assigned to more eclectic and broader analytic frameworks used by a wider range of writers. This view has, in fact, been recently advocated by Worsley. His position is that the culturally relevant properties of illness categories and practices render the label "medical" as a useless tool of comparison with non-western societies. (Worsley: 1982; p. 315.)

This predicament is not new to anthropology. It ran its course a generation ago in the study of religion (Goody: 1961; Spiro: 1966) and more recently in the area of kinship studies (Schneider, 1984), and in the widening analysis of gender as a cultural construct. (Ortner and Whitehead: 1981; MacCormack: 1980; Shapiro: 1981, p. 449; di Leonarda: 1991) During each debate, the usefulness of certain pivotal terms came into question as their application in diverse societies challenged the minimal defining criteria of the analytic category.

Basically, two paths were pursued. First, as with Worsley's denial of "medical" as a useful tool of comparison, strict application of certain terms fail to have descriptive value in the face of cross cultural comparison. Riesman has made note of this problem in his own attempts to translate Fulani words for shame and embarrassment. His conclusion is that "in ethnology the exact translation of an indigenous term is precisely what we must not aim for." (Riesman: 1977, p. 136) The second approach resembles that given by Goody to religion and society. (Goody: 1967) Because there appear to be common elements among the various phenomena which are to be invoked by a particular analytic term, the task of the anthropologist is to decipher what are the common features. A resolution to this impasse lies in the awareness that both approaches toward the applicability

of terms such as medicine and illness are based on an meaningful model, or, in other words, an attempt to understand the meaning of medical categories as they are found in various contexts of communication and experience. As Good argues:

> the meaning of a disease category cannot be understood simply as a set of defining symptoms. It is rather a "syndrome" of typical experiences, a set of words, experiences, and feelings which typically "run together" for the members of a society. Such a syndrome is not merely a reflection of symptoms linked with each other in natural reality, but a set of experiences associated through networks of meaning and social interaction in a society. (Good: 1977; p. 27)

Considered in this manner, physical illness is not just a biomedical condition. Its existence holds implications for social relations; and it asserts cultural meaning in much the same way as does any other social phenomenon. Illness "is a public collective project, a collective representation, with fields of meaning which extend beyond the consciousness of any individual at any given time." (Good: 1977, p. 48) Recognition of illness implies social action and cultural awareness.

A meaning-centered approach to constructing an analytic category of "illness" fulfills several requirements. First, it denies the usefulness of any casual imposition that disease is merely a biomedical set of circumstances, or that symptoms may be reducible to western categories of diagnosis or mental illness. This point will become important below in challenging previous analysis of witch cleansing cults in West Africa. Second, it must allow for commonly shared qualities of the phenomena to be regarded as "illness" in the analytic sense, yet it must extend beyond a simple identification of these qualities as illness. Third, such an extension must provide analysis of the ways in which culturally specific illness concepts are related to aspects of culture and society, rather than isolating these

concepts or restricting their features to any biomedical means of identification.

I will claim that a meaning centered approach to "illness" in Asante appropriately focuses on local notions of power and personhood. In a recent study on the use and application of power in Asante cosmology and society, two Asante authors claim that pre-colonial Asante society identified any anti-social activities and practices "under the rubric of abayisem (witchcraft) even if the activity does not conform to the operational mode of witchcraft." (Akyeampong and Obeng: 1995, p. 21) These authors also note that the Asante universe was suffused with power. This condition was established by the Supreme Being Onyame who created a universe with unlimited potential for power. (Gyekye: 1994, p. 75)

Major sources of power believed to be effective in the lives of all Asante include Onyame, ancestors, mediating gods or deities known as abosom and charms asuman, and medicines, or mnuru. Asante also recognized the powers of small forest beings called mmoatia, who are an annoyance and who carry out the evil whims of some abosom. There is also the evil persona of Sasabonsam, who is dangerous and fosters witchcraft. Asante history and society display a wide range of manifestations of these powers. Asante saw the worlds of humans and of mystical powers in both consort and conflict. Man was the microcosm of the whole and gave meaning and comprehensibility to the entire cosmology. The various sources of power mediate between the living and the gods. The use and abuse of power will be regarded as pivotal in Asante history.

Power was pervasive in the Asante universe, as is the case for other peoples of Africa (Lan: 1985; Gilbert: 1989; Kaspin: 1993). Persons and groups who legitimized this

power and who maintained socially recognized access to it were also capable of translating this access into authority for the control of social institutions. (Ebin: 1989) Thus, political power (authority) could be controlled by specific individuals; but access to power was potentially "available to anyone who knew how to make use of Onyame's powerful universe for good or evil." (Akyeampong and Obeng: 1995, p. 3)

For the most part in pre-colonial Asante society, power was legitimized and controlled solely within the person and office of the king. However, in Asante, as in other parts of the world, "power is acquired by producing or reproducing connections with the invisible world of spirits." (Wiener: 1995, p. 13) Anti-social activities were not uncommon. They were mostly controlled by means of severe punishment which often included death. These subjugated powers reemerged at times of stress when state power was compromised, or diminished, or when it became entirely non-existent.

Scholarship on nineteenth century Asante shows that such a period took place during the reign of Kwaku Dua I, or 1834-1867, and afterward. During this time, power at the center of the Asante state was challenged and it became weakened. This period of great transition in Asante illustrates that "power does not emanate from a single source and social formations are composed of centers and epicenters of power in dynamic relationship with one another." (Arens and Karp: 1989, p. xvi)

Case studies in chapters 4 and 5 will show that power was sustained and utilized by the non-elite of Asante society. Witch-finders cults became both charismatic and routinized answers to the changing moral and political margins of society in the late nineteenth century. Such movements proliferated in large numbers later during British

occupation of Asante.

The realm of existence in which such cults operated has been identified by McLeod and other writers as a "new power." It combined the powers of medicine and the lower level mystical powers know as asuman, "amulet or charm." These asuman were most commonly known as talismans which had the "power to effect definite but limited ends. Each suman was created or copied for specific purposes, e.g. to prevent theft, guard against cutlass wounds or protect a farm from wild beasts." (McLeod: 1975, p. 108) Rattray noted that these ritual objects were descriptive of the so-called "fetish" shrines used in witch-catching rites, and that it was an object "closely associated with the control of the powers of evil." (Rattray: 1927, p. 23)

Within the traditional state, these powers were legitimized by the state. However, change was always basic to Asante cosmology and its constituencies of power. Because supernatural powers originated beyond Asante society, new, more effective powers were constantly expropriated. Foreign deities were obtained in war and consulted before military conflicts, for example. (McLeod: 1981, p. 66)

Thus, as state authority was weakened in the nineteenth century, these powers were assumed by other civil persons. This transition was possible because of a universe which was suffused with power. Those possessing power at any particular time could potentially do so with unlimited capacities for its use. The creative use of power in regards to healing the body is the subject of this thesis. Character and appearances of Asante witch finding movements may be understood only in contexts of certain historic developments and in reference to Asante cosmology and notions of power.

Another way in which power was manifested in Asante was the matrilineage. Alma Gottlieb has written of the matrilineal Beng of Ivory Coast as having identity as members of a matrilineal line. The matrilineage provides "substance" in kinship terms to the identity of persons. (Schneider: 1968, p. 52) This identity, she claims, is equivalent to power in the sense that people derive conditions of labor, of ancestral perpetuity, and of social personhood exclusively through the matrilineage. Thus, circumstances which prevail as destructive, and thus anti-social, to the matrilineage are viewed as evil, and are likely to be labeled as witchcraft. Thus, witches are known to eat the flesh of kinsmen and to consume the womb, breasts and other fertile and nurturing parts of a woman. They also devour unborn children, and cause the death of new born infants. (Gottlieb: 1989, p. 253)

Similar conditions of destruction and consumption within the matrilineage become apparent to Asante witch-finding. The matrilineage was a locale for work, identity, social reproduction, ancestry, and the bearing of children. It was a place of power. Violation or destruction of these conditions of social life in any manner was a heinous act. Witches were thus known as entities who carried the power to do such acts. These acts centered mostly in the human body. Witch catching thus centered on the body as a form of treatment.

Asante witch finding may only be defined in reference to new attempts to utilize and control socially recognized power within Asante cosmology. Witch finding presupposes an intimate, sometimes terrifying, relationship between human society and a mysterious other world. This mystical world is portrayed both as the bush and as the imaginative realm of spirits, especially ancestors. The bush was ambiguous by nature. Sinister entities of the bush operated contrary to human life. They constantly invaded human

cultural space, and thereby inflicted damages in forms of disease and death. Their influence was also felt in the form of failing production in a new world of commodities and "moral economies." (Austen: 1993) Witch finding may thus be defined as a mystical and ritual attempt to renegotiate and utilize supernatural power in an attempt to neutralize anti-human forces, and to "cure" living human beings through whom these forces operated. I consider illness and well being to be conditions of personhood in African social life. It is useful to begin with a consideration of the notions of persons and personhood as will be used below.

**1.2 Personhood and Illness**

The use of personhood as an analytical tool has a lengthy anthropological history. The terms person and personhood have been descriptively used in a variety of ways. They have been often been considered in conjunction with other terms such as self and individual. The multiplicity of approaches requires that I define a more narrow usage.

Fogelson has noted how the term "person" has often been confused with "self," and "individual." The result has been an overall inability to make significant intellectual refinement on any of the terms because they have all been applied interchangeably at one time or another. (Fogelson: 1982, pp. 67-110.)

The indeterminacy of usage may stem from, among other things, an attempt to view the person in two distinct, but not opposing, kinds of analysis. Harris has shown how American cultural anthropology, with its tendencies toward "psychological and symbolic" apprehensions, often ignores the person-as-agent in society in favor of more subjective concerns of self and individual. Her outline of these terms demonstrates the differences which may be constructed between studies which focus on inner motivations,

feelings, and intentions of the individual, and those which stress the person's position in society. (Harris: 1989, p. 607)

Both Fogelson and Harris identify the beginnings of the concept of personhood in the writings of Marcel Mauss. (1933; 1985) Mauss continued to emphasize Durkheim's logic of the relationship of the individual to the larger collective group. But while Durkheim saw that all "individuals resemble each other" (1933: p. 131) and that under mechanical solidarity "one's first duty is to resemble everybody else" (1933: p. 396) in the formation of mechanical solidarity, Mauss identified the situation in reverse. This was clear to him in Zuni society, where "we already see a notion of the "person" (personne) or individual, absorbed in his clan, but already detached from it in the ceremonial by the mask, his title, his rank, his role." (Mauss: 1985, p. 6) For Mauss, the composite of "status, forenames, titles, rights and functions" of each individual creates a separate social character, an identity of social personhood, which distinguishes each individual from another. Mauss noticed that among the Australian Arunta, distribution of names identified the individual not only in his descent group and clan, but also in relation to ancestors. A social personhood is thereby established which defines "the position of the individual in the rights he enjoys and his place in the tribe, as in its rites. (1985: p. 11)

Following these authors, I consider such concepts as self, individual and personality to refer to psychological issues or phenomena, focusing on, e.g., subjective awareness, motivation, and attribution in a social psychological sense. I also follow Harris in regarding the individual as "a single member of the human kind." (Harris: 1989, p. 600) This precept recognizes that "not all individuals acquire the standing of full persons as

agents-in-society." It follows here that I will not make attempts to reduce cultural ideologies concerning the inner make-up of suspected witches, nor the social relations which surround witchcraft confessions and accusations, to psychology, or to derive any of these from psychology. (Shweder: 1991, pp. 156-185)

Emphasis will be given to two concepts, "person" and "empirical agent," or "empirical actor." A "person" will be defined as a being to whom is acknowledged the capacity for intentional agency and purposeful, directive action. This action is founded upon the presumption of judgmental ability within a framework of moral and jural standards. (Fortes: 1987, pp. 247-286) Persons are considered agents of meaningful behavior rather than random or meaningless actions. It is the capacity to create and recreate judgement in behavior acknowledged by and accepted by reference to moral and juridical norms of social life which entitles personhood.

This formulation stipulates that non-human beings may be considered as persons. It also stipulates that certain human individuals may not be considered persons. Asante infants and children, for example, are considered as lacking the capacity and standing which would permit them to behave in ways which could be considered by moral standards and norms given to persons of meaningful actions. (McLeod: 1981, p. 37) As such, they do not qualify as "persons." Moreover, aside fromQueen mothers ( ahemaa), Asante women are historically considered as "objects of accumulation and consumption." (Allman: 1991, p. 177) Women remained objects of power between men well into the 1950's; and often cases of witchcraft suspicion and confession centered on women. To this extent, Asante women did not qualify as full jural persons in the same way as Asante men. Moreover, the hierarchy

of Asante society projected varying qualities of personhood on men of different social and political standing. This hierarchy becomes evident when, in the twentieth century, most participants of witch finding cults were members of lower class and social standing.

The historic argument will attempt to show that some actors who were recognized as having social entitlements allowing them to achieve lofty social statuses lacked qualifications to either fully aspire to such statuses or to endure within them. Consequently, I prefer to regard the entitlements of personhood, and the capacities ascribed to persons, as being qualitative in nature rather than quantitative. In other words, minimal degrees of capacities are culturally recognized in any number of individuals who shall be considered persons. But society may further distinguish a select number from these as having the necessary entitlements for occupancy of certain key or notable positions in social life. This thesis will attempt to show how individuals have historically and creatively regarded the various meanings of Asante personhood, and how these meanings have been challenged, defiled and upheld in the discovery and confession of witchcraft practices.

I will attempt to show how the person then uses such meaning to interact within social relations of early twentieth century Gold Coast. Much of the historical argument demonstrates that beginning in the late nineteenth century, Asante life was experienced and lived from the perspective of a culture of colonialism. Yet it would be far too simplistic, and wrong, to see this cultural setting as something which imposes itself upon the lives of Asante in a way which is systematic and coherent. Rather, early twentieth century Asante society was composed of "groups of individuals who continually define their lives in contra-position to seemingly accepted norms." (Arens and Karp: 1989, p. xvi)

In this case, personhood has a temporal dimension, even an historic reality. The status of relations among particular persons changes over the course of their multiple interactions. As conditions of temporal existence become altered through socio-cultural changes, or by life cycle changes, the basis for defining and acknowledging personhood may be reassessed. In circumstances of life cycle changes, it can be seen how "differing agentive capacities come to be imputed to, bestowed on, enunciated, or withdrawn from named humans as they enter and leave various social" phases. (Harris: 1989, p. 604) In other words, personhood, with its ramifications for accountability and privilege, is defined in relation to locally situated biographies. Designated human agents are thus incorporated with the moral and juridical features of their society. Socially designated processes, often ritual, endow the person as such; and they are thereby recognized as legitimate human actors.

Persons are henceforth designated to behave with recognized social entitlements, and to live a "moral career." (Harris: 1978, p. 49-77) Within this moral space comes the acknowledgment that persons will act upon and negotiate human relations and cultural values. The human agent, or actor, is thus culturally conditioned and capable of behaving morally and purposefully with others. Cultural meaning and moral judgement will thereby be understood as embodied within the person. Cultural meanings and social values need not be seen as resting only at the level of the institution or of society in general. (Hanson: 1975, pp. 11-23) Rather, they supply models of and for behavior within the person.

Such cultural meanings are often expressed by persons through commonly understood metaphors. For example, in Kenya, illness caused by spirit possession among Taita women became a forum for expressing competition between men and women over

control of exclusively female resources of women's bodies and female labor. (Harris: 1957)

These metaphors identify and address personal and social discontinuities. They thus,

> provide people with the means to address and deal with the adversities of everyday social life, many of which are common to people in all human societies: the betrayal of friends, the dissolution of a marriage, a death in the family, disappointment, illness, penury, and homelessness. (Jackson and Karp: 1990, p. 27)

The provisions of culture, however, do not always match human experiences. Neither identity nor intentionality are easily conflated to social structure in the sense of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown. The person may indeed serve to articulate the various domains of society, politico-jural, familial and ritual-moral, one with another. (Fortes: 1969, pp. 95-99) Yet, the identity of the person -- his or her human experiences -- may not be assumed to be fully formed in the roles, rules and customs of these domains. To equate personhood with structure and role is to deny individual agency in favor of social determinism. To consider identity to be in line with group solidarity is to deny personal experience in favor of collective consciousness. As Riesman notes, even behavior which affirms social values may be called into question. "We cannot any longer take for granted that we know why a person is doing something when his actions happen to coincide with the "dictates" of his culture." (Riesman: 1986, p. 91)

Emphasis will be given to the person not just in its structural setting of a "variety of statuses." For social relations, as Riesman's statement implies, are comprised of more than a composite of human interactions "to which given norms and patterns of customary behavior are attached." (Fortes: 1969, p. 97)

Features of personhood are orienting processes in which aspects of the world

are identified and presented within the lives of individuals. Accounts of Asante society and history have almost exclusively presumed the premise that personhood is wholly formed within the defining roles and criteria of the polity and from within the matrilineage. This approach has been highlighted by scholars such as Ivor Wilks and Meyer Fortes.

In this thesis, I will argue that circumstances of illness, experiences of embodiment, and traditional concepts of power as seen through healing performances of witch-finding cults challenge this structural approach. I will show that Asante personhood was called into question through witchcraft for particular individuals in specific circumstances; and I will argue that rites of healing in witch-finding movements were therapeutic attempts to eradicate all effects of witchcraft and heal the person. This alternative approach of personhood is grounded in contemporary theoretical understanding of the human body, most notably seen in the works of Thomas Csordas and Pierre Bourdieu.

Csordas claims that a key feature of locating the individual within society are the notions of perception and practice. Perception is, following Irving Hallowell, the ability to identify one's self as an "object in a world of objects." (Hallowell: 1955) An individual's personality and persona become real participants with other objects in the world through what is recognized today as practice. The individual is thus not only situated within the world. It is related to the "behavioral environment" by linking behavior to the objective world. This process links "perceptual processes with social constraints and cultural meanings" (Csordas: 1994a, p. 6) through self-awareness and reflexive capacities.

Csordas continues by claiming that orientation and perception of the individual in the world are grounded through the existential conditions of embodiment. His

argument is an existentialist one. It resembles philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty who claim that the body introduces an individual "into an order or relations that pure physiology and biology do not have the slightest idea of." (Merleau-Ponty: 1964, p. 68) Likewise, for Bourdieu, the body is the "principle generating and unifying all practices," and which "organizes the vision of the world in accordance with the objective structures of a determinate state of the social world." (Bourdieu: 1977, p. 124) In other words the body is subject, and is also the basis of experience in the world. "Because the self is a mode of being in the world, the feature that must be stressed is a feature of embodiment." (Csordas: 1994a, p. 15) Therefore, defining qualities of personhood are found not only in structural relations of society. They also involve "self processes," which are part of a shifting set of relationships between bodily experience, the world, and cultural notions of practice. (Csordas: 1994a, p. 15) Stated differently, "the appropriation of bodiliness ... is the fundamental matrix, the material infrastructure, so to speak, of the production of personhood and social identity." (Turner: 1994, p. 28)

Among the Akan, of which Asante is an ethnic group, certain basic elements are present as defining qualities of the person. Twumasi claims that Asante view the person as a "compound of both the physical and spiritual entities." (Twumasi: 1975, p. 21) According to Wiredu, the "conception of personhood ... has two types of constituents." First is the "material body as commonly perceived." The second is the unique qualities of personality and destiny which have been ordained and assigned to the individual through the endowment and power of deity. Personality is immaterial. Nevertheless, the person which is lacking physical qualities is "conceived on the model of the living body or, better still, of

the living person; so much so, that it is frequently spoken of as a replica of a person." (Wiredu: 1992, p. 139)

Gyekye confirms this analysis. But he also adds that Asante, by virtue of being Akan, personhood also adds the feature of what is often translated as "the soul," or ɔkra. The body and ɔkra form an "indissoluble or indivisible unity." (Gyekye: 1995, p. 101) This word has been translated as soul mainly because Asante believe that it is essential to sustain life, and because it forms the innermost self or essence of an individual. In 1959, Margaret Field wrote, "Kra is usually translated as "soul," but is that which sustains physical life. Everything alive has Kra (even incubating eggs have kra.) But when you die your kra goes away." (Field: EMP)

ɔkra is considered to be in the blood as the principle defining character of the matrilineage. "ɔkra passes through the matrilineal system, and the father's side also contributes the character." (Obeng: personal communication, 1997) Kyei is in agreement, and states that the person has two main constituent parts. "A person is an individual of two inherited elements that dwell in the physical body. These two elements are the "blood" (bogya), "all those linked by same mother or same household" and the "soul" (ɔkra). The bogya, inherited through the mother, is the abusua (lineage) and the ɔkra comes, in part, through to him from the father. (Kyei: 1992, p. 54) Even in the womb, the individual maintains a delicate balance. It is susceptible to disease and death through misconduct of the mother. After the birth, the ɔkra inherited within the child may avenge any wrong doings by the wife. As a result, she may fall ill and must confess her actions. If she does not, the child's life may be threatened. The soul of a person is thus a composite of essences from

both father and mother; whereas, the body is regarded as being from the mother.

For Asante, membership within the matrilineage is a large composite of the identity of the individual. Gyekye advances the point that the immaterial is fashioned in the image of the material body. He states that the two make up an interactive relationship. Not only does the body have a causal effect on ɔkra; but also ɔkra has a causal effect upon the body. (Gyekye: 1995, p. 101) This relationship is particularly manifest in times of illness.

> They (the Akans) believed also that spiritual uncleanness was an element of ill health and that the cleansing of the soul was necessary for health. When, for example, a patient was made to stand on a broom while being treated, it was to symbolize this cleansing. The broom sweeps filth away from the home and keeps it healthy; so the soul must be swept of filth to keep the body healthy. (Busia: 1962, p. 19)

In Asante cosmology of healing and the body, what happened to the body reflected on conditions of the soul. The body indicated the disposition of the soul. Asante notions of health and healing were directly derived from this premise. "When the soul is enfeebled or injured by evil spirits, ill health results; the poor conditions of the body affect the condition of the soul. The condition of the soul depends upon the condition of the body." (Gyekye: 1995, p. 101) The effect of these spirits on the body takes results in various forms of sickness, disaster, sorrow or death.

For this reason in Asante history, some diseases were regarded as pertaining to the "soul" more than to the body. These diseases could not be cured through physical therapy. "Disease is an attack by a spirit upon one's spirit, and it can be overcome by medicine whose spirit is stronger than the spirit of the disease." (Appiah-Kubi: 1981, p. 12) Treatment of physiological (body) and spiritual conditions (ɔkra) was considered essential. These symptoms were identified and addressed by specialists. "The removal of a disease of

the soul is the activity of the diviners or the traditional healers." (Gyekye: 1995, p. 101) Moreover, in Asante "the body is both a text and terrain for the drama of cosmology. That belief has not changed. Healing rituals enable the participants to redraw the boundaries of their cosmos, redefine identities and also shape aspects of reality." (Obeng: personal communication, 1997) The body was indeed central to Asante cosmology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Changes within society altered perceptions of both cosmology and of the body. "Illnesses" such as barrenness and sterility, for example, became closely associated with suspicions of witchcraft.

Good has similarly argued that the body is not a site of domination or an object of medical control. Rather, the body is a "creative source of experience." (Good: 1994, p. 118) Illness signals a shift in the embodiment, and thus the identity, of an individual. Illness signifies various forms of assault upon the personhood of an individual. Illness thus contributes to "the unmaking of the world," or conditions of the body under stress.

I shall argue that illness contributed to the "unmaking" of the Asante world and personhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Within Asante cosmology, such illnesses were not physiological in character. They were "diseases of the soul." As such, they were not reducible to western categories of physical or mental disorders. Moreover, their treatments demanded the authority and legitimacy of particular forms of healing. Healing within witch finding movements represented one such form of therapy.

**1.3 Witchcraft and Witch Finding: Africa and Asante**

Within the past decade anthropologists writing on witchcraft and witch finding in Africa have emphasized uses of the past and historical production. An earlier generation presented witchcraft as a form of "primitive thought," alternative realities (Nadel: 1954), or multiple rationalities. Witchcraft was regarded as a means of social control (Gluckman: 1965: 69), the normative release of tensions among kin (Turner: 1957), and as representation of conflict within the village (Douglas: 1963). African witchcraft was assumed as part of a set of beliefs and cosmological precepts.

Recent scholarship situates witchcraft and witch finding within the political and economic realities of the post-colonial state, a position long thought antithetical to the continuation of witchcraft (Geschiere: 1988; Rowlands and Warnier: 1988; Shaw: 1997). Witchcraft is presented as integral to the political and financing strategies of businessmen and politicians (Geshiere: 1997; Niehaus: 1993), as part of the normative patterns of literate and urban life (Bastian: 1993; Meyer: 1995), as an inevitable result of a breakdown of polities and of the codes of purity which they controlled (Chidester: 1991), as a means of competing between genders for capital and resources (Apter: 1993; Austen: 1993; Drucker-Brown: 1993), as representation of the incongruities and antipathies between village and town populations (Kaspin: 1993; Parkin: 1993), as a means of memory in disreputable forms of gift giving and exchange of objects (Masquelier: 1997), as a source of identification and accusation in cases of HIV and AIDS (Yamba: 1997), as encapsulating the problems inherent in labor migration and capitalist endeavors (Auslander: 1993; Weiss: 1996) and as a confirmation of the ambiguities of advancing Western economies and commodities (Matory: 1994; Schmoll: 1993). In some cases the consequences of witch finding and accusations are

most severe. Mesaki reports that between 1970 and 1984 in the 13 regions of Tanzania, at least 3,692 persons were killed as a result of witch related activities. (Mesaki: 1994)

Conversely, witch finders have been utilized as witnesses in courts of law to provide evidence for the states against persons accused of domestic violence and other forms of abuse through mystical means. (Geschiere and Fisiy: 1994) Evidence of such attacks simply cannot be legitimately provided in any other way. "Their expertise is indispensable to the judges who need "proof" of the mystical forms of attack." (Fisiy and Geschiere: 1991)

These studies portray witchcraft and suspected witches as an embodiment of new commodities and economies and as "cannibalistic" predators of human productive and reproductive worth. Witchcraft and witches are seen as capable of changing or distorting their bodily forms (Jackson: 1989), and of turning into vampires (Weiss: 1996). In such cases, in Asante for example, the witch is known to consume the flesh of other human persons or of those potential humans (fetuses) which are not yet born.

These studies portray the witch as having emerged within conditions of modernity, more specifically economies of colonialism and post-colonialism. In Africa, cash economies, urban and international shifts in migration, cash income from labor and farming, disparities in income producing new differences in class, and production of commodities under new forms of labor relations have all been fertile ground for the study of witchcraft accusations and confessions. In Africa, "a central trope of witchcraft beliefs is the misappropriation of scare reproductive resources from households or communities for the selfish use of accumulating individuals." (Austen: 1993, p. 100)

Thus, as a signifying form of modernity, witchcraft is flexible in its

application and elastic in its content. But its manifestations are specifically rooted within common forms of corporeal malediction. These often include specific symptoms of disease, bodily malfunction, inability to conceive and death. As noted by Jean and John Comaroff, "its signs work by rooting expansive moral meanings in the naturalizing ground of human bodies." (Comaroff and Comaroff: 1993, p. xxvi) Bodies convey meanings of misfortune in vital life processes and human values such as birth, death, wealth, inequality, power, and so forth. This point was noted by Evans-Pritchard when he asserted that what witchcraft does is to bring people into contact with events in such a way that they are injured. (Evans-Pritchard: 1937, p. 68)

New scholarship of African witchcraft emphasizes less social structure and more history. Previous studies portrayed witchcraft as lacking history. Specifically, the new trend links contemporary forms of witchcraft with colonial processes which date back to the beginning of the present century or earlier. There is a concerted effort to divest witchcraft from any appearances of lacking a temporal dimension. Implications of this point are obvious. Modern forms of witchcraft are regarded not in opposition to pre-colonial times, a period sometimes assumed as bereft of history. Rather, they are seen as containing many features from this period, but also changing according to the disruptive economies and theologies of contact.

For example, MacGaffey's writings of BaKongo religion in the new Republic of Congo show that contemporary practices of witches resembled the deeds of European slave runners in a previous period in central African history. "The historical slave trade was assimilated to beliefs in contemporary witchcraft, both regarded as illicit traffic for profit in

the souls of persons killed and transported by occult means." (MacGaffey: 1986, p. 62) Such an approach to witchcraft demonstrates the intricate ties which are established with local historical processes. The present study will show the development of Asante witch finding shrines over a period of 1879-1945, and how witch finding was closely linked with historical processes both internal to Asante and from European influences.

The Asante Twi word for witchcraft, bayi, is similar to the same word from other Akan peoples: ayene, busufo, and bayifo. All of these words designate a person who dispenses evil and whose influence upon others is evil. This is done in several ways. Akan witches claim the capacity to cause sickness, damage crops, inflict impotence and sterility, ensure a still birth, and cause death. (Bannerman-Richter: 1982, p. 15) An Akan witch resembles other persons in many ways, both physically and spiritually. The witch, however, has the ability to leave its body at night and inflict harm and injury on unsuspecting victims.

This definition is useful in its attention to destructive capacities of witches. But it is not complete. The Reverend Hans Debrunner notes that the same definition given to Nupe witchcraft is also applicable to Akan witchcraft. "The specific concept of witchcraft is the idea of some supernatural power of which man can become possessed, and which is used exclusively for evil and antisocial purposes." (Nadel: 1935, p. 424) The notion that witchcraft must also include antisocial behavior and practices is critical to Asante witchcraft and to Asante witch finding. (Appiah-Kubi: 1981, p. 13) Twumasi notes, further, that Asante concepts of illness and misfortune were attributable to anti-social behavior. "Any deviant behavior may be subjected to sanctions from the spiritual world; and ill health is one of the devices which may be inflicted upon the traditional deviant." (Twumasi: 1974, p. 23).

Two previous theories have been advanced to explain the appearance, function and content of Asante witch-finding. First, Ward and Field argued the cults were "new" to the Gold Coast in 1929. Witch-finding appeared as a result of stresses on local social organization, particular the matrilineage. Such stress appeared as a result of the twentieth century expansion of the cocoa industry (Ward: 1956) and because of a dramatic increase in venereal disease among local populations. (Field: 1960) Under such dramatic global "causes" there were local African "responses" of the loss of cooperation within the lineage and increased "insecurity" within the general population. Goody responded directly to this argument saying that insecurity and "anomie" were not inevitable consequences of colonial influences. He also claimed that the cults were recent replacements for older forms of witchcraft detection. (Goody: 1957)

The second approach to Asante witch-finding, advanced by Field, Tooth and the Reverend Hans Debrunner, focused on a bio-medical model as a basis of explanation. Again, a premise of Western "cause" and African "effect" was presumed. Both writers viewed the occurrences of diseases like leprosy, scabies, blindness, deafness, and the influenza epidemic of 1918 as the basis of mental displacement and a rise in social "insecurity." Field noted she was "only interested in the mental states of the patients" who sought treatment at witch-finding shrines, and not in the shrines themselves. (Field: EMP) Many such diseases were introduced by Europeans, and caused changes is personality, intellectual impairment, hallucinations, and habit displacement (Tooth: 1950, p. 9) Such effects ultimately resulted in mental disorders of neurosis and schizophrenia. According to this bio-medical model, persons suffering from mental disorders in Asante became suspect

of an evil disposition or of witchcraft because of manifest symptoms and unusual behavior. "In the forest zone, especially in Ashanti, the lunatic is more feared than respected because of his potentiality for evil." (Tooth: 1950, p. 30)

These were the general abnormal mental conditions of witches who believed they had the power to inflict others with the same bio-medical effects. Thus, Debrunner wrote, "Most of the witches I have personally heard confessing before an anti-witchcraft shrine gave me the impression of people suffering mentally." (Debrunner: 1961, p. 78) Moreover, these mental disorders afflicting Asante were strictly bio-medical symptoms in a Western sense, and were comprehensible not as cultural phenomena but as categories of Western psychiatric diseases. "A primary neurotic states of the witch is a concept which the European can easily grasp, and there are many clauses in the African presentation of witchcraft that can be translated almost word for word into the language of western psychiatry." (Field: 1937, p. 136) Witch finding shrines ultimately arose as a means of protecting people from the presumed effects of witchcraft. (Debrunner: 1961; Field: 1960)

This thesis argues that while the effects of disease cannot be denied, medical knowledge and practice vary socially and historically. Moreover, colonial influences may not fully explain West African reactions. Such reactions are understood only within a broader historical framework. Further, techniques of the body are never reducible to bio-medical or Western psychiatric categories. Labels such as "neurosis" shed little light on witchcraft and witch-finding. The body is, instead, a "creative source of experience" which mediates illness behavior within social relations. Evidence of these premises is given by the historical example of bodily shape shifting from West Africa.

Shape shifting, or the presumed ability of someone to change from their anatomical form as a human being into an animal, has been noted by writers such as Lindskog, Beatty, Kalous, and Jackson. Lindskog has documented hundreds of cases of such transformations throughout west, central, and east Africa. In most cases, a person changes shape to become a leopard or a lion. Shape shifting into baboon and alligator form has also been recorded. Lindskog notes that shape shifting involves either inhabiting the pre-existing body of a leopard, or the creation of an animal corpus where there was none. In all cases of this genre of folklore, as he calls it, African ontology does not create distinctions between animals and humans as is found in western methods of observation and evidence. In other words, "the natural division between humans and animals does not have the same incontestable validity for the Negro as it does for the European, and this boundary was regarded as permeable, if it was recognized at all." (Lindskog: 1954, p. 144) Lindskog also provides photographs of metal objects used to simulate leopard paw prints and those used in acts of violence.

The account of leopard men by K.J. Beatty, a barrister of Middle Temple in London, is a legal treatise of the trials of such "human leopards" in Sierra Leone in British colonial courts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Beatty notes an early document of a Bishop Ingham: "The Temnes believe that by witchcraft a man may turn himself into an animal, and, in that form, may injure an enemy. A man was burnt at Port Lokkoh in 1854 for having turned himself into a leopard." (Beatty: 1915, p. 3) Both Beatty and Kalous provide court documents and transcripts of 17 trials which effectively prosecuted 87 of 186 defendants in colonial proceedings between 1903 and 1912. The 87 were found

guilty of murder and were executed "in the vicinity of the place where the murder was committed."

Early victims of attacks were mostly black youths. The rate of assaults around Imperreh in 1880 prompted neighboring chiefs to issue a plea to the colonial Governor to resolve the issue. Governor Sir Samuel Rowe, however, advised them to deal with it according to native custom. (Kalous: 1974, p. 228) Increased attacks and murders by leopard men, now with white victims, resulted in colonial legislation which made Leopard, Baboon and Alligator societies illegal according to the Human Leopard Society Ordinance of 1895. The rate of attacks failed to decline, however, which led to the British annexation of a large portion of the hinterland of Sierra Leone as a protectorate in 1896. A Special Commission Court Ordinance was added in 1912. This allowed for expulsion of a defendant from the immediate district even if he was acquitted.

The 1895 Ordinance makes frequent reference to borfima, a bag of medicine often used by leopard men. Its contents includes the white of an egg, the blood, fat and other remains of a human being, the blood of a chicken, and grains of rice. Borfima is activated by human fat and blood. The constant need for replenishing its power requires new victims. The intent is to make its owner rich and powerful. Borfima will also assure acquittal in European courts; and it will ensure honor and respect among other blacks, and power over white men. Borfima was "the dominant factor in measures directed against neighboring chiefdoms and, in more modern times, even in securing allegiance to resistance, passive or otherwise, against the British government. Thus, the ritual sometimes served political and xenophobic purposes." (Lindskog: 1954, p. 61)

Lindskog continues by noting frequent use of the bush in leopard society activities, as an environ which seemed to be "pervaded with something supernatural." The use of medicines such as borfima was often perceived by the British as an elaboration on customary rites performed under the pretexts of religion. Poro ritual initiations came under suspicion as a means of conveyance of borfima. British suspected Poro to be a stage for ritual murder carried out in the style of secret leopard societies. By 1905, eyewitness accounts of such acts of violence were being sworn under oath to local colonial officers who wanted to use such testimony in order to legally suppress performance of Poro and to prosecute those who were "doing actual bodily harm" to any of its members. (Kalous: 1974, p. 149)

A deposition given by Charles Parkes in 1894, "in re alleged cannibalism in the Imperri," testifies to the dubious nature of the "fetish" borfima and its abilities to contract mystical power and illegal acts of violence upon random victims. By this date, leopard society violence and homicide had been done to some whites; but the greater proportion of victims were blacks themselves.

> We saw them take the fetish (Borfima) out of a tin box and rub it with blood which was in the calabash nearby. They had on no clothes. Then they took it and tied it up and addressed it as follows--"Do not let any trouble come to us. Let us get plenty of slaves. Do not let the Government know how to free them. Let us be rich." (Kalous: 1974, p. 112)

Other depositions cited by Kalous strike a similar note of individuals seeking power or riches through mystical means of leopard societies. Medicines were used as a means to these ends. Medicine was also used to confound the minds and purposes of the European. Medicines were thus effective resources for neutralizing the presence of the

whites. But they were never effective unless activated by human agents who could change shape in the African bush.

Tensions of the times were, in part, the cause of appearance for such medicines and their powers. These included tribal conflicts between Mende and Sherbro, the fallout of refugees from the Mende hut tax rebellions, tribal warfare over emerging trade and wealth, and the uneasiness of domestic slaves due to the imposing controls over slave trade by certain hinterland chiefs. Local resentment towards colonial and mission control over religious and political practices widened the crisis on a new front. (Kalous: 1974, p. 6-7; Jackson: 1989, p. 114)

In African societies, focus on the body also causes questions of personhood and illness to emerge in local ideology. Healing causes victims to be confronted with the "question of who owns their person and who controls their consciousness--themselves, or a supernatural being? Yet, all these processes of shifting identity, consciousness, and control recognize the integrity of the human vessel, the irreducible humanity of (men and women) in the execution of social re-design." (Matory: 1993, p. 82) The fact that the individual body is often used as statement of ills of the larger social collective, tensions within the matrilineage or conflicts of power in colonial society for example, will be used as evidence to support this view. But Asante examples below show that the individual body is not only a medium of individual and societal ills. The historic ethnography shows that the body also serves as a symbol linking the individual to the larger social collective. This larger unit will be the family, the clan or the matrilineage.

This thesis may thus be seen as a continuation of the debate in anthropology

between structure and event. It may be considered as a discussion regarding the meanings of social processes versus the meanings of persons/actors as they experience a lived in set of historic circumstances.

As persons exit from the public sector of their own social surroundings and depart into the bush, or the roadside, or the shrine locale, or a ritual performance on the margins of a community, they are free to create their own world. They are free to express their sentiments or create their own relations of power toward other living persons (or toward mystical entities from an unseen existence.) They become experiencing agents. They are not, for the time being, defined solely by the culturally determined structure and its objective social categories.

Concepts of personhood and power are key elements of a theory of disease and illness in West Africa. These notions are particularly relevant when the discussion of illness involves cases of witchcraft, as well as its counter methods of discovery and accusation.

Moreover, concepts of personhood and illness in this vein must focus on the body and its surrounding metaphors. Such metaphors provide two separate but related functions. First, metaphors of the body distinguish persons as unique sorts of agents or social beings, and provide for a lack of personhood among other types of living entities, including some humans. The possession of mlungu among the Taita, for example, "an incorporeal but sentient component functioning as a mystical agent in the world," qualifies certain entities, human or otherwise, as persons. (Harris: 1978, p. 31)

Secondly, similar metaphors link persons to other beings regardless of their

status as persons. Among the Ma' Betisek, for example, under certain conditions wandering human spirits procure plants and animals for food. These plants and animals are then no longer perceived as food but as humans with mystical powers which may be the cause of illnesses and are potentially destructive to living humans. They are referred to as having human like qualities derived from the souls of the dead. (Karim: 1981, p. 136-138)

The use of bodily metaphors either to construct personhood or to assert a commonality within the world is basic to concepts of illness and healing. This question has been mostly ignored in the literature of ethno-medicine. Yet it is reasonable to assume that illness is not restricted in any culture to human persons. It may be ascribed to a wider range of beings. Thus, if illness helps define personhood, how is it that non persons are often viewed as having illness? West African data on illness, personhood and power provide a test case to help answer this question.

Western bio-medical models of disease stand in contrast to the notion of illness in West Africa. The bio-medical approach assumes a physiological malfunction of certain biological states or processes. Accordingly, any plant, animal or human -- person or otherwise -- is thus capable of contracting disease. Even though illness among human persons is treated differently than among non humans, the theory of disease causation is qualitatively equivalent in both realms. Thus, those approaches made by anthropologists replicating this biomedical model from one cultural setting to another are likely to ignore local concepts of the cause and the healing of illness within persons. Such a view is contest in this thesis.

Considering illness in the West African case as an incapacity which is directly

related to the body immediately removes it from the Western notion of biomedical and physiological disorders. Thus, while the biological causes and symptoms are likely to be acknowledge and treated, illness also implies concepts of personhood. These social facts must also be pursued in the treatment of illness.

I have suggested in this chapter that concepts of personhood containing sufficient analytic criteria are useful and necessary for a social and cultural framework for understanding illness. Illness is considered as an inability, or potential threat, to personhood. This treat is often imposed by some mystical agent such as in the case of witchcraft. Furthermore, this implies that illness within persons is often assumed as the result of agency on the part of another individual, and that the treatment of illness often requires countering these measures. Moreover, I have argued that perceptions and treatment of illness are often shaped by historical conditions of political economy. As we will see, such counter measures ran at a fever pitch before and during the British colonial period in the Gold Coast Colony.

In the next chapter I supply a general ethnography of Asante in order to situate further analysis of Asante notions of personhood and illness within the colonial period.

**1.4 A Note on Historical Sources.**

The main sources for this study are archival materials, printed primary data and oral interviews. The National Archives of Ghana (Accra, Cape Coast and Kumase) and the Asante Social Survey Materials gathered in the 1940s contain the majority of the archival information on Asante used in the thesis. Supplementary information on Asante, and sources on British contact have been taken from the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Archives. Many

relevant volumes on Asante published between 1880 and 1930 have also been used.

A note of caution and an awareness of the short comings of some of these sources is in order. Analysis of the historiography of European sources on Asante must account for the fact that Asante remained a steadfast opponent to European penetration of any kind. The validity of these sources must be regarded with the ethics of journalism in the sense that a second source is needed to reaffirm the authenticity of each point and summary. The fact that both Asante and British were painfully clear regarding their mutual sentiments is both a help and a hindrance. Prejudices and hostilities on both sides are evident in the record. However, with only limited exceptions in the nineteenth century, there were no literate Asante to negotiate the extensive written diplomacy between Kumase, Cape Coast and Accra. As a result, literate Ga and Fante were needed as interpreters. All interpreters were impeded by at least some deficiencies. These included an imperfect command of English, a limited understanding of Asante idioms, especially court and administrative terms, and feelings of resentment toward Kumase which had once plundered their populations. These antipathies are detectable in written sources; but original Asante expressions are now unknowable since they were never written down.

Other Europeans, mostly British, published their accounts in helpful journal-like books. These included T.E. Bowdich, J. Dupuis, T.B. Freeman and R.A. Freeman. The Swiss men F.A. Ramseyer, J. Kuhne and M.J. Bonnat were Basel missionaries in Kumase and southern Asante through British annexation. Earlier journals were logged by Bosman. Accounts of these authors exhibit numerous errors, exaggerations, and a European bias, particularly in descriptions of religion. The backgrounds and nationalist tendencies, as well

as missionary agendas, are evident in several cases. However, many of these errors may be corrected by checking their accounts with other sources of the times. Oral traditions gathered by later authors have also revealed the short comings of earlier accounts. Circumstantial evidence also provides a contextual background. Thus, descriptions of human sacrifice given by Ramseyer and others reflect their temporary status as prisoners and the stress under which they lived. It also shows an attempt at lobbying European governments to intercede in these matters. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Ramseyer softened his rhetoric in attempts to introduce Basel missionaries into Kumase. Understanding such contexts and limitations allows for a greater use of such first hand sources. These journals convey a sense of life on a day to day basis in Kumase and in assorted rural areas of Asante. These sources are thus invaluable since they report circumstances known to only the oldest members of society when Captain Rattray was commissioned to the region.

Until the 1970s, historians made little use Basel and Methodist missionary archives. Prior to that time, the prevailing view was that since Asante did not accept Christianity until British rule, relevance of these records was considered negligible. It is now apparent that Asante in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be recreated without the accounts of Ramseyer, Freeman, West, Picot and others. These men had direct discourses with the kings. They witnessed state rituals and human sacrifices. They obtained valuable responses from kings as they attempted to open schools and churches. The content of their journals is thus important, even though their wording often is sufficient to disclose their bias and contempt of local customs. These biases were sometimes deliberate in order to obtain sympathy and increased funds from their home offices. Exaggerations are often

apparent; but when they are not, care is required when using this data.

Twentieth century ethnography and philosophical investigations display an overwhelming interest in status, office, and polity. The literature is extensive and detailed, and reflects an orientation towards politics, kingship and the state. The amount of literature on the Asante state is unrivaled in coverage of any other African kingdom. Indeed, Asante scholarship may be one of the most vast bodies of ethnographic and historic writings of a kingdom anywhere in the world. In a summary of West African ethnography, one writer's assessment spoke of the extensive documentation. "Nowhere in Africa — perhaps in the world -- has a pre-colonial polity been more thoroughly researched than the kingdom of Asante, political center of Ghana's Akan peoples." (Hart: 1985, p. 257)

Three important figures of the early to mid twentieth century are Rattray, Field and Fortes. Rattray was a colonial officer who wrote extensively on Asante law and religion. His data reflect sensitivity to local practices and an attempt to be comprehensive in certain areas. Rattray wrote during a transition to colonial rule. Some of his older informants were eye witnesses to critical developments in the late nineteenth century. The data is valuable, especially when verified from other sources. Field's data on witch finding shrines is remarkably detailed and lucid. However, her theory is questionable--perhaps even bizarre. Certainly not everyone who visited shrines suffered depression and schizophrenia, nor were they all victims of "insecurity" created by modern conditions of cocoa industry and venereal disease. (1960) In 1959, Field admitted to Eva Meyerowitz her preconceptions of witch finding. "I am only interested in the mental states of the patients who go to the *abosom* [shrine deities], not the *abosom* themselves." (MJF: EMP) The mental states of

"patients" are relentlessly understood in western bio-medical terms. Because of the structural approach in which he wrote, the work of Meyer Fortes on Asante resembles Ivor Wilks when his analysis centers on polity, role and status. Unpublished data gathered in the 1940s, however, provide valuable detail of Asante religion, personhood, and custom.

While much of the literature focuses on the state and its structures, there are also notable and serious lapses in coverage and in detailed description to other aspects of Asante society. The state has received a major portion of attention by scholars; whereas society and the individual have received limited or no description. The place and presence of the individual is indeed often muted in nearly all of the literature on Asante life. The facts of scholarly coverage have produced unprecedented documentation in one regard; but the lack of attention to all areas of society and existence reveal basic deficiencies. Results show a narrowness in scope and often a predictability of conclusions. This ethnography has two serious deficiencies.

An overwhelming amount of this ethnography, demonstrated most notably by Wilks, concentrates on the pre-colonial polity. From the perspective of understanding elite African politics, such a pursuit appears as an intellectual given. However, in practice the results of this approach have yielded descriptions of a state and ruling elite which were isolated from the rest of society over which it administered and within which it was formed. This social order itself disappears into a shapeless background in which persons (motivations and intentions), personhood (its defining qualities) and human relations of a micro-level sort are reduced to an assumed or motionless status. Beneath the din of office, role and structure, the activities and movement of individuals are hardly distinguishable. Moreover, it is

assumed, astonishingly, that all power is maintained and controlled within and by legitimate state agencies. In a universe such as Asante, where power was quite limitless, this point of analysis seems remarkably constricting.

Secondly, this perspective is largely materialistic in character. All human intentions are conceived within the parameters of a logic of material advantage and practical reason. In other words, historical processes and cultural understandings are assumed to be determined by imperatives of state administration. Self-advantage and self-interest of elites are often the voice by which all members of society are heard and understood. This elite perspective defines the ruling class as those who create history, rather than looking at the margins of society, or the "people without history." Within this gaze, all Asante are seen as acting rationally within the orbit of elite politics. Keith Hart has characterized the major proponent of this approach, Ivor Wilks, in the following manner. "His account of Asante is rationalist, stressing the real *politik* of interests at the state capital and thereby lending to Asante protonationalism an air which wold not seem out of place in eighteenth century Europe." (Hart: 1985, p. 257)

Whenever individuals are mentioned, they appear to be functioning powerlessly within the same materialist setting established by a ruling body. Further, whenever religion, belief, custom, and power (fundamental aspects of cultural practice) are analyzed, they are seen as rational and materialistic. Or, they are seen as minimally important. Because of this approach, cultural practice is often never fully developed; and individual attempts at power never seem to surface. In addition, medical practices, and concepts of the body and healing have been of little theoretical significance in comparison

to the drama unfolding at the level of the state. In part, this thesis is meant to reverse this trend by supplying an increased understanding of Asante religion, medicine, and personhood in a specific historic setting.

Chapter 2 provides an historic and ethnographic overview of Asante society. Of particular importance is the realization of power and its legitimization within the person of the king. Chapter 2 includes a review of Asante religion and cosmology. It also analyzes descriptions of illness and disease in the nineteenth century. Descriptions are taken largely from European accounts. Chapter 2 also presents ethnographic detail of economy and society. This section is followed by the argument that relations of power profoundly and irrevocably changed in the second half of the nineteenth century. Reasons for social change came from within Asante society and were prompted by the rising presence of Europeans in West Africa. Chapter 3 expands this scenario by showing how capitalist, educational and evangelical influences affected an increasing engagement with western culture, including new forms of individualism and a weakening of state power. Chapter 4 uses this historic context to demonstrate the formation of new forms of power found within witch finding movements. Four different historical phases of the movements are provided. Chapters 4 and 5 present over six decades of historical analysis of Asante witch finding from 1879 to 1945. Chapter 5 outlines British attempts to suppress witch finding; and it gives detail of how these rulings were largely ignored. Chapter 6 and 7 summarize the theoretical and historical arguments presented throughout the thesis.

## Chapter II

### Ethnographic Background

This chapter presents an ethnographic and historic overview of the Asante of western Ghana. I present this material in a way which will help provide context for the data given in chapters four and five, and for the analysis given in chapter six. I am also presenting this historic review so that I might contend that certain deficiencies arise in the corpus of literature on Asante. This literature is voluminous; but it has overly emphasized institutions of state and military and political struggle at the expense of attention given to the individual and the person in a West African setting. Thus, this over view will consider Asante history, particularly in the 19th century, as an opportunity to consider the person and his or her individual capacities for power within specific historic conditions.

I intend to show that the decline of the state along with its politico-military abilities to gather wealth in gold and people, and to wield political might created conditions of individualism in a modern sense and the potential for accumulating personal wealth. This arena of new wealth was not linked to either the political hierarchy of the state nor to traditional notions of rank based largely upon political power. Rather, it represents a new form of individual and class elitism based solely on the possession of gold, a form of status which was not previously present. It was during the latter part of the period, from around 1840 to 1880, that anti witchcraft movements first make an appearance in the historic record. Further, state dissidence occurs during the height of British colonialism, circa 1900-1930. During this period, the cults and other religious and secular movements flourished under widening conditions of modernity: social, economic, and religious. However, to fully

comprehend the state under siege and under enormous internal fluctuation, it is necessary to look briefly at the circumstances under which the state arose.

**2.1 The Ethnographic Past: Overview of Asante, 1701-1870.**

The Asante state arose toward the end of the seventeenth century. Because of the relatively recent period in modern history, the details of the political system have been well documented by European and other West African observers. The attention given to this state expansion has been notable. One writer has stated that, "Ashanti could be said to be the nearest approximation to a modern nation that was reached independently of European influences." (Kimble: 1964, p. 264) Indeed, the Asante state was unlike many other African states because it was formed out of a widespread emphasis on consensus which was counterbalanced by concerns of power.

A precise time period in which Akan peoples migrated into the forest zone in West Africa is not clear. Fynn notes that the area was fed by immigrants from various region in Africa. (Fynn: 1971, p. 3) Migrating groups who settled in the forest appear to have maintained the social and economic resources which helped build the states which arose by the late seventeenth century.

Ivor Wilks notes how pre-state myths associate organized politics with a change from hunting to farming. Clearing of land required a massive organization of labor. Man-power was acquired in the form of slaves. Slaves were retained through extensive networks of long distance trade. These networks extended north to Timbuktu and Jenne, and eastward to Hausa and Nupe. Slaves thus helped increase the rate of agricultural production. (Wilks: 1977) Production, in turn, helped push the need for technological innovation. New

tools were utilized to form and perform other kinds of labor such as mining. Discovery of abundant sources of gold in the western forest regions was thus a direct outcome of labor and innovation.

Control of trade routes thus became a primary aim of Asante. This control later halped centralize the power of the state in Kumase. Routes to the north and to the south of Asante were redirected through or near the capital. This allowed for wealth to be accumulated in great proportions in that region. This wealth was translated into military might. This power increased the centrality of Kumase as a crossroads of commerce and as a military hub. By the eighteenth century, the wealth and power of Kumase greatly exceeded that of other members of the confederation. This resulted in a shift of power in favor of Kumase.

Political systems were also organized around agricultural production. This resulted in the rise of a network of Akan proto-states at the beginning of the fifteenth century. These included Adanse, Bono-Manso, Fante, Denkyira, and others. These proto-states arose out of the relations of agricultural production and its relations attempts to clear the forest. These early states made efforts at military expansion. The name for the location of the early state, kwaeman, or "forest state," reflects systematic attempts to domesticate aspects of nature. But lacking a cohesive center, their efforts yielded only meager results. Asante was the first Twi speaking people to develop such a political center.

Struggles by early migrating groups with the dense forest have been preserved in Asante religion, ritual, cosmology, philosophy, settlements and conditions of human existence. This struggle has created a dynamic universe for Asante. The unpredictability of

existence and the ever threatening power of the forest informed much of Asante life and ideology. The struggle between community and nature has been ever present in Asante history. Indeed, Asante history encapsulates a range of divergent and opposing views and events which have been reckoned as indicative of the struggle between space of community and space of the forest or nature. Much of the argument presented in this thesis is an attempt to understand the significance of this struggle as it is manifest in perceived conditions of illness, healing and power during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Success in this endeavor will depend on a comprehensive reading of the relevant documentation.

Osei Tutu, born in 1645, is considered the father of the Asante state. The source of Osei Tutu's political prestige was his position as head of the Oyoko clan, the premier kin unit in Kwaman. Osei Tutu made a series of political decisions which enhanced his standing. The first was the declaration of military and political autonomy of Kwaman. This resulted in the military superiority of Kwaman. Secondly, he learned various forms of warfare and amassed the nucleus of a sizeable army. This army consisted of infantry, bowmen and spear men. Within this organization were several levels of military authority. Early military engagement and suppression of Dormaa, Tafo and Kaase in the 1680s resulted in the superiority of Kwaman and Osei Tutu. He then forged political alliances with the conquered groups, and a new non kin federation took shape. The Asante state was created and sustained by war, and military power remained a central part of state ideology until the end of the nineteenth century. This ideology was manifest in the key elements of Asante life, gold and guns.

The fame and might of Osei Tutu soon spread. He forced and forged

additional neighboring groups into the confederation. Treaties within the alliances recognized a basis of equality among all founding parties, except Kawaman, which was viewed as first among equals in the union. Osei Tutu then moved his residence from Kwaman to Kumase; and this became the new capital of the confederation. Osei Tutu had supreme power, but he was never a divine king in the accepted sense. Rather, his power arose from his ability to align and conquer neighboring chiefdoms and from the authority to exact tribute from within the expanding borders of Asante.

> Spoils of war, tribute of slaves and of material goods from subject tribes, dues and duties levied on citizens and the constituent chiefdoms, trade on a substantial scale in gold, kola nuts, and slaves both to the interior and to the coast in return for textiles, flintlock guns, gunpowder, European liquor, tools, and many other commodities, brought wealth to the courts of the king and of the regional chiefs. (Fortes: 1969, p. 140-141.)

Within the alliance, Osei Tutu formed strong connections with religious leaders. Asante cosmology consisted of three tiers. At the top was the supreme deity, the creator of all things. Contact between this level and humans, however, lacked immediacy; and all manifestations were made through lesser gods, or abosom. Abosom takes its meaning from abo, or stone and som, to worship. Abosom was defined to me as "the material things in our heart we worship," and "anything apart from Onyame that we worship." The word was also characterized as a generic category for all "fetish" or witch catching shrines. These deities had their own priests, or akɔmfoɔ, who acted as their chosen servants and mediators. More will be said about akɔmfoɔ (literally, "one possessed," but commonly referred as "priest") later in this chapter. At the third tier were the more predominant nsamanfo, or ancestral spirits. Nsamanfo protected society and gave advice on all sorts of daily concerns.

Central to the political might and mystical support of the confederacy was the Golden Stool. The Stool appeared to one early European observer as a "palladium of the Kingdom." (Bowdich: 1819, p. 281) Indeed, the Stool is said to contain the spirit (sunsum) of the Asante state and of all individual Asante. Everybody has a sunsum. Animals and many material objects also have a sunsum.

Captain Rattray gathered folklore of the Asante Stool in the early 1920s. This lore states that on a Friday, a gathering of Union chiefs was held at Kumasi. At that meeting, the supreme counselor of Osei Tutu, Okomfo Anokye, brought from the sky, in a black cloud and thunder, amid air thick with white dust, a wooden stool which was partly covered in gold. The Stool descended through the air until it rested on the knees of Osei Tutu. Anokye then announced the Stool contained the sunsum of all Asante, as well as the health, bravery and welfare of all Asante. These would survive if the Stool was protected and defended. (Rattray: 1923, p. 289) Upon the Stool must be seated the Asante political sovereign, who was "therefore appointed to act as the intermediary between the royal ancestor and the tribe." (Busia: 1957, p. 26)

Arrival of the Golden Stool coincided with a military victory in 1701 over Denkyira, a suzerainty to the south of Asante. This great victory is widely acclaimed as the embryonic point of political independence for the Asante state. From this point on, the elite functions of Asante operated at the political center of the state. The Stool became its national symbol. The Stool itself has shaped public opinion and consensus toward the political center. Indeed, many historians write of Asante politics, and its symbol of national consciousness, to the disregard of individual Asante themselves. In this manner, Chazan

claims, "this stress on an impersonal, even abstract, point of reference and identification gives an ideological complexion to the Asante model which permits participation and stresses voluntary cooperation." (Chazan: 1988, p. 70) Acceptance of the Stool, in other words, was an individual declaration of citizenship.

The sika dwa kofi, or Golden Stool, symbolized political authority and absolute power of the state. Within the Asante kingdom, this centralized power became legitimate. McCaskie has described the "intimate binary relationship" between sika mena, symbolizing wealth, and the sika dwa kofi. Legitimate authority of sika dwa kofi was maintained only by its physical possession. Sika mena, meanwhile, was metaphysically wrapped around the sika dwa kofi in a relationship of assistance, enabling support and aid. This relationship helped facilitate the historical processes of state formation outlined above. The state, in other words, was brought into existence by the possession of wealth. By extension, the legitimate authority of the state continued to rest upon the notion that political authority was directly linked to the "effective controls over the right to amass and to dispose of wealth." (McCaskie: 1995, p. 48) Therefore, the two supreme concepts resided simultaneously at the height of Asante state and society. Sika mena represented the highest level of the accumulation of wealth. Sika dwa kofi represented the highest level of the expression of legitimate political power. Sika mena was thus conceptually understood as material support of sika dwa kofi, which was itself the sunsum of all Asante. Historically, the notion of sika mena was thus always situated in relation to material and cultural purposes, "the embedding of culture, the increase of society, the articulation of political authority." (McCaskie: 1995, p. 48) Sika dwa Kofi literally means "gold, chair, Friday." I was told that

it "embodies the soul of Asante."

The significance of Friday may be Muslim in origin. Other Muslim areas of West Africa, such as Mali, designate Friday as a special day of prayer and power in Islamic cosmology. (Gibbal: 1994, p. 48) In this chapter, it will be shown how traditional concepts of wealth and power were radically altered in the nineteenth century. As an icon of the past and of the ancestors, the Golden Stool was an inalienable object. (Weiner: 1992)

It is important to remember the Asante state arose and existed for nearly two centuries upon the unique concept of consensual government. This government itself was based on an explicit code of laws commonly known as the Asante constitution. Asante differed from Zulu in the sense that Zulu contained no consensus among kin group coalitions, nor was it presided over by a council of religious elites. Zulu also did not recognize any religious and symbolic relics or icons. Asante also differed from Yoruba and Bambara kingdoms in that both of the latter did not contain the strong centrist style government which associated the interior realm of power with the welfare of the state as a whole. As will be seen in this chapter, the internal collapse of this ideological center led to divisiveness and estrangement among individuals within the Asante state.

The period after the Asante consolidation emphasized military expansion and the building of empire. Elite groups were formed which helped administer the state as a kind of civil service corp. Councils included chiefs from regions near Kumase, and were given stools. Councils were formed and led by Opoku Ware (1720-1750). Council members and stool holders also controlled resources and wealth "which enabled them to maintain life styles commensurate with their positions within the rank order." (Arhin: 1983b, p. 11)

Nevertheless, power was centralized and legitimized ultimately within the asantehene. This power is exemplified by the capacity of the king to take life. Slaves and all Asante who committed crimes subject to capital punishment were potential recipients of an immediate and absolute sentencing by the king. Thus, ritual human sacrifice of slaves demonstrated the state's ability to commit ceremonial murder in order to fulfil religious and political obligations. Consider the following entry logged on October 8, 1844 by the Wesleyan Methodist missionary G. Chapman. He writes concerning the recent performance of odwira in Kumase.

> The Yam Custom, now nearly over, has been distinguished by its usual barbaric splendor, excess, and iniquity. Amidst much of a most distressing nature, one circumstance has not been without its happy effects on my own mind. Only one human victim, and he a criminal, has bled during the Custom. This affords a pleasing contrast to the bloody scenes of former years. Surely the time hastens when these sad transactions shall be forever no more. (WMMS: Box no. 1260, #1150)

Chapman's years in Kumase were entirely within the reign of Kwaka Dua Panin (1834-1867). Chapman observed odwira in its annual setting in Kumase on several occasions. He resided in the Asante capital at a time of great social and economic transition. Human sacrifices, which Chapman described as "usual barbaric splendor," were witnessed on occasions of odwira; but the missionary also noted the taking of life elsewhere. Wharton wrote of the same theme in 1846. "Human sacrifices are of such frequent occurrence in Kumasi that the benighted inhabitants have become perfectly naturalized to them." (WMMS: Box no. 1260, #1150) Capital punishment was noted by Chapman and others in the early and mid nineteenth century as punishment for stealing, for murder, and for adultery with any wife of the asantehene.

Sacrifice during odwira resulted not only in death of someone already under sentence to die for a crime. But the corpse was mutilated to pieces. The whole drama was justice set within ritual. The fate of the sacrificial victim thereby reinforced notions of an ordered cosmology.

The state was equally controlling of the body in matters of ethical/unethical actions. Foucault has phrased the power of the state over the individual as "disciplines of the body: the harnessing, intensification, and distribution of forces, the adjustment and economy of energies." (Foucault: 1978, p. 38) The body was itself invested with relations of power and domination, as noted by Foucault. These relations dominated the body, making it productive and subjective at the same moment. Meanwhile such domination is maintained through "instruments of violence or ideology." In Asante these ensured the perpetuity of the state, since the body was conceived "not as property, but as a strategy; that its effects of domination are attributed not to "appropriation," but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings..." (Foucault: 1977, p. 153) Asante state hegemony over the individual body was therefore not unlike military expansion over foreign polities: they were consumed in order to fulfil the destiny of the state.

In situations of adultery with the wife of the king, the guilty woman first had a spike driven through her cheeks so she may not render a curse on the king. She was then beheaded. The fate of her lover was more severe. Rattray describes a process known as atɔperɛ, or "dance of death." He also had his cheeks thrust with a spike to keep him from cursing the king. Beginning at 6:00 a.m., he was led through Kumase to the zone known as "in the midst of blood." The nasal septum is pierced, and he is led about with a thorny ring.

At the house of the Asafo chief, the left ear is severed. At the nearby village of Bantama, the right ear is dismembered. He is then forced to dance throughout the day. After nightfall, he is brought before the king and his court. Arms are detached at the elbows, and legs at the knees. His eyelids are removed; and he is ordered to continue dancing. When he can no longer dance, his buttocks are removed. He is then placed on a pile of gun powder. The powder is lit. Before dying, a slice of skin is cut from his back. He is told that, "Since your mother bore you and your father begat you, have you seen the skin of your back?" As the body is dying, sons of the executioners are permitted to hack off parts of skin and bone. (Rattray: 1927, pp. 88-89)

This penalty was absolute. Its punishment implies absolute deference to the person of the king and to his position in the state as the sole individual who carries reproductive capacities which perpetuate kingship and state powers. Guilty parties of such a crime could not bargain any other punishment. By contrast, men among commoner ranks had no status or rank to inflict serious penalties upon an offending wife, nor did their status allow them to collect substantial compensation from the lover. (Allman: 1996, p. 36)

A final example of the supreme control over the body demonstrates the state's intrusive abilities in matters of political philosophy. This example comes from the diary of W. West, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary. In 1862, a group of travelers, including West, headed north toward Kumase from Cape Coast. At the village of Fomena, the party was greeted by a royal entourage who were ordered to "see that the road was properly cleared," and to accompany them into Kumase on a day which was auspiciously appropriate to receive foreigners. This resulted in a short delay. Their respite was had in the village of Eduabin,

described by West as "a miserable little place, and the prospect of remaining there two nights and a day was not a very pleasing one."

Early in the morning of March 14, a drama arose involving "an old man in the town" and his daughter. West noted the man had been "in good circumstances;" but a sequence of fines leveled on his family for "their misconduct at different times" had eroded his assets. The man asked his daughter for "coco," a consistency of maize, to eat. The daughter refused, saying she intended the food for sale in the market. The man begged. Again, she refused, and told him she would offer him none of the "coco" which she was cooking. The father was soon "enraged" by the third denial. West described the commotion as follows.

> Angered at her refusal, he determined to revenge himself by putting the whole family to expense and inconvenience, though at the risk of his own life. He therefore as the natives express it, "cursed the King." He swore, for instance, that the King would be killed by the fetish, if they did not, at once, bring him an anker of rum. This they were obliged to procure at any cost, for, had they refused to do so, their own lives, as well as that of the old man, would have been forfeited on the plea, that they wished the King to be killed, or they would have procured the rum to prevent it. He next swore that the King would be killed, if they did not get him six sheep; these also had to be procured, and the little town was ransacked in order to obtain them: and in a similar way he demanded a number of fowls. By this time the whole town was in a state of alarm, for no one could see where it would end. (WMMS: 1862, box 263, #1224)

Soon the old man became "insensible from the quantity of liquor" he imbibed. He also ordered the sheep and fowls be slaughtered. His request was entreated immediately. At this point, some of the meat was placed in baskets by the royal messengers which accompanied West. One escort of the asantehene Kwaka Dua Panin took the evidence and "started off to inform him of what had happened." The old man became ill from drink and

the towns people "feared" he would not live until the return of the kingly messenger. As West notes, "in which case, they would all be in danger, as it would be said, they had killed him in order that he might escape the King's vengeance." (WMMS: 1862, box 263, #1224)

The condemnation was realized in a few short hours. West was awoken at midnight to the firing of musketry. Kingly escorts had returned from the 10 mile ride to Kumase. They had emptied their muskets into the old man. After killing him, they cut off the head.

Each of the above examples demonstrates the power of the state and its control over the individual person as is manifest in its demise, dismemberment and eradication of the body. In Asante, a "recognition of the body as a source of understanding of human experience," (Fernandez: 1991, p. 330) must include the assessment that the state maintained hegemony over the person. This hegemony included power over the body.

McCaskie has argued that such royal capacity to control the person also implies an ability to create history. The dissolution of the body "represented the invasive ideological power of the state at an absolute level -- the body (its wholeness, its integrity) simply disappeared, and literally vanished from history." (McCaskie: 1995, pp. 254-255) Pre-colonial Asante values included the supreme authority of the state and its sovereign rule over all attributes of human society, including the individual person. State authority could be pronounced in auspicious occasions such as the ritual of human sacrifice. Or, authority could be manifest in more sublime "fields" (Karp: 1978) of human conduct, such as in the very public streets of Kumase or at the isolated village of Eduabin. It has thus been argued that in the above three examples of power, "the very existence of the body was appropriated

by and liquidated within the framework of the state's morphological representation of itself." (McCaskie: 1995, p. 255)

Arhin argues that Asante state and society did not realize the concept of class until at least the reign of Kofi Karikari (1867-1874). He contends that groups identified by Wilks and other writers as "classes" are more correctly regarded as "status groups." Asante hierarchy is more correctly interpreted as a system of rank, and not a system of classes. Elite status was acquired through several means. Individuals were given commissions on tribute collection; they proffered trade loans; they shared in court fees; they received cash and other gifts for acting as mediators between the king and others; some were appointed as military leaders, and as a result received surpluses of goods taken in battle; and they had shares in any gold found on lands placed under their authority. "In all these ways they were enabled to acquire and accumulate wealth which facilitated a distinctive life style. It was these men who were permitted to exhibit their wealth, to engage in a regulated show of it, in order to announce their accession to the ranks of authority and wealth." (Arhin: 1983, p. 8)

Asante elite also were considered to attain the same rank and status after death. At times, this ascension to power in the after-life led to ritual executions of commoners who made affronts to their political authority. The Asante notion of power, both within the state and in its connections to mystical life, "encouraged competition for power and authority and helped in mobilizing support for the state." (Arhin: 1983, p. 9) This system of rank, authority and power in Asante existed until the twilight of the state itself, the period of 1870 and afterward, when political corruption and European economies and education ushered in new forms of competition and status into Asante.

The head of state, or asantehene, was required by law to deliberate on internal matters of state with these political and military councils. Through the councils, the King was successful at suppressing periodic rebellions from member states. However, the political question in the Kumase administration was: "who should control this accumulating power and how?" (Hagan: 1971, p. 47) This form of government established Kumase as the center of administration and power. A weakness of the Kumase centered administration was that it placed "responsibility for the integrity and effective control of Ashanti's tributaries upon Kumase." (Hagan: 1971, p. 47)

The expansion of Asante was steady and decisive, first to the south and then east. By the late 1740s, Asante dominated most of the coastal areas, including the Ga regions of Akuapem near Accra. Further defeats of Fante in 1807 resulted in domination of the areas around Cape Coast. At that time, Asante held political and military control over most of present day Ghana. Internal sources of revenue included the mining of gold dust. External sources of funding were brought by tribute, gifts, and fines. Tribute had both political and economic consequences. Politically, its imposition and payment was a symbol of subjugation. Refusal to pay meant a form of rebellion. (Arhin: 1967, p. 286)

Captain Rattray first noticed the key to Asante social organization was matrilineal descent. This fact is typical of many Akan peoples. Matrilineal descent organizes the lineage at the local level, and is essential in organizing dispersed clans on a more regional level. This fact is generalized in the proverb, "when your mother dies, your lineage is finished." Every Asante of free matrilineal descent is a member of his mother's lineage (abusua) by birth. This fact also qualifies the individual as a citizen of the local

chiefdom in which the lineage is domiciled. Moreover, "identity is situated in the context of the matrilineage. That one shares in the being of the abusua and by implication, humanity, one also participates in all that the people utilize in defining themselves." (Pashington Obeng: personal communication, 1997) Abusua refers to "family...somebody who has the same blood."

Rattray indicates that the justification for Asante adopting inheritance and descent matrilineally is the presence of blood at birth and during menstruation. Matriliny is emphasized between mother and child on these occasions since only "blood alone can be transmitted by and through a female." (Rattray: 1923, p. 77) Abusua has thus been metaphorically identified with blood, and with its most common occurrence of pregnancy and birth. The notion that blood could be rendered from both parents was inconceivable to Asante.

Clark points out that loyalty to matrilineal kin remains a fundamental moral principle and emotional commitment in many portions of Asante. (Clark: 1994, p. 97) Some lineage members may temporarily avoid obligations, but they cannot deny them altogether without also denying their own identity and selfhood. Renouncing the lineage or its members was equivalent to denying the gift and essence of life. There was no identity without the matrilineage in Asante. These bonds extended before birth and beyond death. Ancestors were believed to be concerned with the future prosperity and purity of the blood which they shared with their descendants, both living and those yet unborn.

Children were regarded as a gift of Onyame, or god. The number of children was also predestined. But evil entities such as witches interfered with the numbers of

children and with their births. Witches took away the mother's womb and concealed it under rocks in a stream or under a tall tree. Barren women almost always conceded their affliction as the work of witches. They usually sought help from fetish shrines in order to "obviate the evil influences of their suspected malefactor." (Kyei: 1992, p. 52) Personal identity was crucial in Asante. This identity was always susceptible to attacks from witches. "It is the case that a person's identity is situated, informed and grows in relation to the abusua. It is from the abusua that a person can be bewitched, or, with the help of a member of the abusua one can come under the influence of a witch. The bliss and security of the abusua available to its members can be threatened for individuals when they encounter one misfortune after another." (Pashington Obeng: personal communication, 1997)

At the local level, a segment of the abusua was sometimes regarded as yafunu, or children of one womb. Yafunu means "stomach." This segment was most often four, but sometimes five, generations in depth. Its members considered themselves as direct descendants from a common ancestress. Members of a yafunu shared a number of institutionalized relations. These included inheritance, the levirate, and mutual aid at times of debt or the payment of funeral expenses. The localized matrilineage was found to be most clearly defined in areas showing long periods of settlement in a single location. Long term settlements, such as the village or township, were divided into wards (brono). Brono were occupied by the members of a single lineage.

The maximal lineage within a community was considered the largest extension of a yafunu. Kinship terms used in the matrilineal household identify to all members of the maximal lineage. Children born to a woman were considered to be members

of her own matrilineage and clan, not of her husband's clan. All inherited property belongs to the woman's maximal lineage and the clan. Her husband had no control of this property. The rules of exogamy also applies at the level of clan. A village or town was often made up of two or three maximal lineages within the clan. The agricultural mode of livelihood was often based on metayage, or share-cropping. Members of a clan, but of different maximal lineages, regarded one another as distant kin. (Fortes: 1950, p. 259) Yafunu membership also creates residual use rights in houses or land owned by the matrilineage. This property may be utilized by members of a yafunu with little or no negotiation over its use. Within the yafunu, however, strict gender barriers apply in cases of inheritance, use of property, gifts, loans, and farm or business allocations. (Clark: 1994, p. 97-101) Thus, the social relations of daily life in nineteenth century Asante took place among members of a common yafunu. The yafunu included the basic elements for social continuity; and its common features persisted into the twentieth century.

**2.2 Asante Medicine in the Nineteenth Century**

Before developing further the conditions of economy and society in the nineteenth century Gold Coast, it is useful to expand the argument. A discussion of both medical practices and of religion during this period will provide such an expansion. This information is provided for two reasons. First, as noted by several writers, in order to fully comprehend the concepts of personhood and power in a cultural and historic sense, it is often useful to include a description of ethno-medical practices and of cultural perceptions of the body. (Bisilliat: 1976; Taylor: 1992; Zimmerman: 1987; Devisch: 1993; Kapferer: 1983; Lock: 1980; Wall: 1988; Laderman: 1991)

Secondly, as ethnographic background of religion and a practical summary of medicine and healing are needed in order to more fully comprehend the historic setting of the anti-witching movements. As mentioned above, the practitioners and their shrines may be best considered within distinct historic circumstances of change in the colonial Gold Coast. Historic details of change which affected Asante notions of state and lineage will be provided later in this chapter. Other details of colonialism, especially British overrule, are to be given in chapter three.

Here data is presented regarding the classification and physical treatment of disease in the nineteenth century. Asante illness is defined. It is important to keep in mind that herbalists and their clients appear to have reacted to specific symptoms of health and disease. Much of the literature regarding health and healing in Africa concentrates on its "irrational" or mystical properties. Emphasis has been given largely to priests, ancestors, shrines, cosmology, and ritual diagnosis and therapy. (Evans-Pritchard: 1937, p. 479) This approach of a generation ago pictured an ethnic map of Africa divided among hundreds of local populations, each with clear and decisive geographic, ethnic and cultural borders. Each society was considered to have its own set of medical ideas and methods of healing. The ideas were themselves defined by a set of socially recognized forces which caused one sort of misfortune or another. The role of the healer was to match symptom with cure, and thus effect some sort of ritual treatment.

Problems began to appear with this approach, however. In many cases, it was shown, those stricken with illness did not express their concerns in terms of mystical or supernatural beings or causes. Natural causes were often seen as the sole reason for illness.

In many cases, ancestors, witches and demons were not considered responsible. Those who suffered symptoms of many kinds of disease said that they "just happened," or were due to "commonsense notions." (Gillies: 1976, p. 384)

More recently, writers have recognized conditions of "medical pluralism" in which a variety of treatments are pursued at several different cultural and historic levels. (Janzen: 1978; Mullings: 1984; Sargent: 1989) Donna Maier suggests that her informants at the Kete-Krachi shrine of Dente northeast of Kumase considered "an illness incurable only after attempts at curing it through home remedies, herbalists, Asante Nkramo physicians and, more recently, western-trained nurses and doctors, are unsuccessful." (Maier: 1979: p. 63) While many writers would not consider the quest for therapy to consist of such rigid linear standards, the point remains that African medicine and healing often take place in an atmosphere devoid of religious concepts. These options were noted by several travelers in nineteenth Asante.

The Asante notion of health implied a correct relationship of the person with the social, natural and supernatural environment. Health was associated with goodness, blessing and beauty, or all positive values of living in society. Illness, to the contrary, implies a departure from the balance between the person and society. This is usually attributed to an antisocial act or commission of a taboo. Illness was very often attributed to witchcraft. Illness and disease thus imply an interrelationship between the person and society, and the natural and supernatural worlds. (Appiah-Kubi: 1981, p. 14; Twumasi: 1975, pp. 23-24; Gyekye: 1995, pp. 85-103) Illness and healing also involve a deconstruction and construction of personhood. (Pollack: 1985) Debrunner states that incurable diseases,

such as leprosy, scabies, blindness, and deafness, were associated with witchcraft. (Debrunner: 1961) Records with the National Archives of Ghana suggest that the most common form of illnesses caused by witchcraft concerned reproduction and the future of the lineage: barrenness, infertility, impotence, sterility, and so forth.

Akan vocabulary for diseases has been analyzed by Mike Warren. He claims that the "abstract system of diseases," as classified by Twi speakers in Asante is "represented by a complex, but highly ordered hierarchical scheme with twelve levels." (Warren: 1976: p. 163) Some of these levels were likely recognized by early European writers. For example, one of the earliest accounts of medical practices was given by William Bosman in the seventeenth century. Bosman's account marvels at the remarkable witness of curing among his own fellow Dutchmen. "I have seen several of our Country Men cured by them, when our own Physicans were at a loss what to do." (Bosman: 1967, p. 225) Bosman continues by accounting for the amazing abilities of herbal remedies used "amongst the Negroes."

Joseph Dupuis, who provides the best ethnography of Asante prior to Rattray, speaks of the climate and atmosphere in Asante as "known to be unhealthy." Dupuis noted his own afflictions; and he recorded that many "natives labored under attacks of fever, Guinea-worm, and inflammations." (Dupuis: 1966, p. 84) Speaking of conditions of nineteenth century ideas of malaria, Dupuis says, "The deadly effluvia of African vapours are in general well known, for the rivers upon the western coasts of this continent have recorded but too many fatal proofs to leave the matter in any doubt." (Dupuis: 1966, p. 85)

The account of Henry Tedlie, an "assistant surgeon," is given by Bowdich. Tedlie reported witnessing at least 37 herbs, spices, roots, and tree bark for medicinal

purposes during his visit to Kumase in the early nineteenth century. Diseases most common at the time were "lues (syphilis), yaws, itch, ulcers, scald-heads, and griping pains in the bowels." Other maladies were confirmed, by probably at the "same proportion that they occur in civilized countries." Tedlie made personal observations of the treatments of these illnesses. Unfortunately, he does not mention if the medicine was administered by an herbalist or other specialist; but his diagnosis of symptoms is quite thorough. Asante applied mixtures of such herbs as the plant "Cudey-akoo" with lime juice, secoco with lime juice, tobacco, leaves and bark from various trees, a plant known as Cutturasuh, soap and water, castor oil nut and pepper. Many of these medicines were used for skin disorders and for various forms of stomach pains and dysentery. Tedlie also reported that Asante were generally unable to treat afflictions in cases of gun shot wounds, bone fractures, and hemorrhaging. (Bowdich: 1967, pp. 370-380)

Another Englishman, Henry Meredith, visited Asante around the same time as Tedlie. Meredith made a report of the "diseases among the natives." These included leprosy, yaws, elephantiasis, small pox, Guinea worm, dysentery, opthalmia, fevers, rheumatism, and various poisons. (Meredith: 1967, pp. 235-245) Meredith also observed that the Harmattan had a parching effect on the local populations, but had healing effects for those suffering from fever. "It stops the progress of epidemics; the small pox, remitting fevers, etc., not only disappear, but those labouring under such diseases, when a Harmattan comes on, are almost certain of a speedy recovery." (Meredith: 1967, p. 11)

Finally, the Wesleyan Methodist missionary John Beecham visited Asante in the 1830s. He noticed that,

> In cases of bodily affliction, a medical preparation is ordered for the patient. It has already been noticed, that the fetish men and women apply themselves assiduously to the study of the healing art, and acquire such a knowledge of the properties of herbs and plants as enables them to effect the cure of many complaints. (Beechman: 1968, p. 204)

Beecham does not mention the substance used in the medical preparation.

A mystical cause was always supposed when the king himself took ill. Stroke was associated with punishment by the ancestors. Diarrhoea was believed to be the result of breaking a taboo. Heart attack was linked to mystical retribution for attempting to poison an enemy. At times of sickness, the king was treated by either a medical and ritual specialist, or by an herbalist. The medical/ritual specialist used charms, amulets and talismans which were imported from Muslims areas of West and North Africa. Muslim powers of healing were more absolute that Asante because of their knowledge of healing and abilities at preparation of medicine. The king would be asked to wear amulets on himself, or they were hung in the palace. These would frighten witches and other evil disease causing agents. Healing also involved the recitation of the Koran in the person of the king. "Thus the King's sick room would often be filled with these fortune-tellers and religious Moors." (Anti: 1974, p. 68)

Traditional Asante religion and medicine contained charms and shrines which had the power to heal. The powers of these devices were most often sought at times of attack by witches and black magic. Because these indigenous healing capacities were found in Asante, it can only be speculated that their efficacy was regarded inferior to those imported from Muslim and other areas of West Africa. For example, Owusu-Ansah reported that as early as 1777, a group of Muslim medical specialists was recruited into the Asante corp of

healers to "make their knowledge of Islamic medicine and charms available for the protection of king and state." (Owusu-Ansah: 1991, p. 119) He notes that these Muslim doctors were also charged with the treatment of leprosy, smallpox, severe headaches, sexual impotence and alcoholism.

Sudden illnesses and misfortune were always suspected as the result of spiritual causes. Symptoms of these diseases were interpreted within the Akan lexicon of sunsum yadee, or spiritual illness, or bayi, witchcraft. An exhaustive list of Akan Bono diseases is given by Warren. (1974; 1979b) In Asante, such forms of illness reflected directly upon social relations, disruptions in structure, and anti-social behaviors. Such illnesses were suspected as the result of affecting agents from the spirit world or from entities from the wild. Sudden illnesses and death were commonly attributed to witchcraft. Asante also recognized that spiritual causes of illness, such as witches, required spiritual assistance in order to bring about a cure. (Obeng: 1996, p. 152)

Asante religion and medicine operated at both the level of the individual and society to effect harmony both in human relation and between humans and mystical agents. Warren defines Bono illness as an untoward effect on the spirit, or sumaŋ. The social unit is composed of the spirits of its individual members. Unhealthy individuals "affect the quality of life of the society as a whole." (Warren: 1976, p. 126) Warren notes that a disease such as gonorrhea may have a strictly biological cause at times, while at other times it may be classified as spiritually caused by bad medicine or by witchcraft. (Warren: 1979a, p. 121) Diseases which are believed to be spiritually caused require the therapeutic power of a shrine as manipulated by the priest who manages the shrine. This extra step in analysis is taken

usually after an herbalist has been initially consulted. (Warren: 1982, p. 89)

This definition is applicable to Asante during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Conflict and anti-social activities in particular could have resulted in illness. Within the matrilineage, conflict often gave rise to accusations of witchcraft. Between non-relatives, disputes lead to accusations of the use of harmful medicines, but not witchcraft. In all cases, Asante medicine and ritual healing were capable of both individual and societal therapeutic responses. In all illness, Asante differentiated between strictly biological causes and spiritual causes. Herbalists treated the former, while only priests had the power to treat the latter. Witchcraft was suspect in all cases of rapidly spreading illness and when a sudden sickness was unto death. This form of affliction was treatable only by a shrine priest.

> If someone falls ill, the priest informs him that Fwemeso is punishing him for his offences, for which however he will obtain the fetish's pardon, provided the sufferer is in a position to pay a substantial sum. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

Asante notions of death reflected on their ideas of life, illness, and of success as a moral person. They also illustrate both good and bad death. The time, place and how a person dies were critical in Asante. A good life was exemplified by someone who lived above reproach and according to community and lineage expectations: physically healthy, married and a parent of children, and a property owner. A bad life, on the other hand, was exemplified by antisocial behavior, especially if these activities caused a bad death of the individual. Use of bad magic, failure to marry, to bring children as new members of a lineage are both examples of antisocial acts.

When one dies of old age, or after a prolonged illness, the death is regarded as good. But sudden death, due to rapidly consuming illnesses or suicide, was considered

immoral. If death happens in the bush, the body is not brought back within the confines of the village or town. It is kept outside village boundaries until burial. Sudden deaths of all sorts always gave rise to suspicions of witchcraft. These cases were often brought before shrine priests for further mystical review.

Accusations of witchcraft were often made by Asante and other inhabitants of the forest and the Middle Volta Basin when someone fell ill. On most occasions, they discounted a natural cause to sickness. The Basel missionary Adam Mischlich gives a testimonial of what he saw in the Gold Coast and in Togo in regards to witch finding shrines.

> each fever, each indisposition, each boil is the punishment for slighting and circumventing some kind of fetish dictate. Poisoning by an adversary is also not an uncommon-place, and in many cases death has been the result. In such an instance, if one has a well-founding or unfounded suspicion about somebody who supposedly hexed or poisoned the deceased, then the corpse is publicly paraded through the streets and allowed to collide with the suspect, by which means the accused is arranged and charged with hexing or poisoning. Naturally, the accused sought to cleanse himself of the terrible suspicion and thus undertook the ordeal in order to give the public an opportunity to convince itself of his innocence. (Mischlich: 1899, p. 199)

During British occupation, greater detail is recorded concerning the extent and kinds of diseases and their treatments. This detail is the result of both administrative procedures and the placing of medical staff in areas where before none had been stationed. One such staff member noted the Asante treatment in 1930 for yellow fever.

> A big native pot is filled with water. The leaves of *Odgyamba*, the leaves and roots of *Akodwin*, the leaves of *Ataba, Burosow, Ankama, Dizinakyiem* leaf and root, and cut up and boiled in the pot. The patient is put under a blanket along with the steaming pot and made to sweat. He is washed with this then sponged with cold water. The patient is made to vomit if not already doing so, by being given *Edublafu* leaves boiled with pepper. For three days no treatment is given then the above is given as a rectal injection. An *Adadzinaba* bean and a *Adwi* bean are ground together, and eaten. This is an emetic and purge. If the purging is too severe palm

> oil is given. If the urine is scanty an infusion of *Somenyin* leaf is given. As a stimulant *Emi* and *Nunum* roots are scraped, mixed with eggs and boiled. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/441)

The author of this memo then gave his perception of local medical practices, and how clients of these practices seek them out at a greater rate than the European physician.

> The traffic in native remedies is widespread and fifty people go to native medicine man to one who consults a qualified man. Even the most enlightened African will leave the qualified man and seek the advice of the native practitioner if he considers his progress is not sufficiently speedy. The practitioners are all illiterate and the knowledge of the art is as a rule handed from uncle to nephew. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/441)

Brown writes on epidemic diseases in early colonial Asante. He notes several epidemics of small pox beginning in 1898, and which span the next decade. Epidemics were often started and sustained along trade routes. The 1908 epidemic began with northern migrations, and then extended along routes between coastal villages. This epidemic lasted three years. Dr. Jupe, a European medical officer noted that when small pox was introduced into a village, usually only the immune escaped. He claimed that case mortality was between 15 and 40 per cent. (Brown: 1978, p. 189) Precise figures of mortality are non existent because not all of those who acquired small pox submitted to treatment in Kumase hospitals. Local populations were unwilling to cooperate with the government in divulging exact numbers of dead due to the disease.

Brown shows that the "Spanish" influenza of 1918 was the most devastating epidemic on record in Asante. The disease began in Europe, and then spread to Africa via train loads of soldiers. By early fall, a newly opened hospital in Kumase was rendered nearly non-operational because of the numbers of staff displaying flu like symptoms. Shortly

thereafter the gold fields near Obuasi were shut down because the labor force was too sick to work. By December the disease had run its course. But the worst was yet to come.

Severe episodes of plague broke out in epidemic proportions beginning in 1918 and throughout the 1920s. Asante and Ga populations were the most seriously affected. Rats were captured alive by the hundreds and burned in order to kill the disease spreading fleas. Brown reports that the plague was introduced into Asante via the railroad from outside its boundaries. Brown notes that European medicines and an anti plague campaign which included school and business closings and a mass scale quarantine were largely responsible for limiting the outbreaks of the epidemic.

Data on diseases during the colonial period is presented in order to provide a background for the claims made by local populations regarding the frequency of illness and death, particularly infant mortality. During the early pre-colonial period Asante were subjected to relatively few serious epidemics and diseases. Increased exposure to other African and non African populations facilitated the possible spread of infections. Brown notes that the spread of the plague in the 1920s and early 1930s was the clearest demonstration of the rise of disease correlating with the influx of foreign populations. (Brown: 1978, p. 201)

It is precisely during this period that witch finding cults spread in vast numbers throughout a large proportion of Asante villages, towns, and in Kumase. Witch finding surely pre-dated the European. However, during the colonial period witch finding movements arose in new forms and in increasing numbers. This increase appears to correlate with, at least for the decade beginning in 1918, with the rise of major epidemics such as

influenza. The influenza epidemic created disaster in all of Asante. Certain major cults of the time were highly medicinal in content; and their adherents continuously evaded British attempts to have them suppressed. To understand this development, it is necessary to comprehend the mystical world of nineteenth century Asante.

**2.3 Religion in Nineteenth Century Asante**

As a summary of her scholarship on nineteenth century medical practices, Maier states that "illness was in many cases approached as a physical disorder to be combated at first with physical means." (Maier: 1979, p. 81) Maier is attempting to argue that Asante approached illness at first as something with a physical cause and cure. Maier thus outlines Asante medicine as primarily a set of biomedical conditions. She also claims that because of this priority of treatment, that the rational mind of Asante may more likely embrace "adaptive change" than previously suspected. Her intention is to show how "western concepts" may be "coordinated with traditional African thought." Medicine and healing in nineteenth century Asante is the venue for this comparison.

While the scholarship of Maier's review is impressive, her conclusions represent the kind of approach to medicine and healing which was challenged in chapter I of this thesis. It will be seen again in chapter IV. The epistemology resembles that of Horton, Field, Debrunner and others noted above who attempt comparisons of science and healing across cultures. Such comparisons rarely edify. Moreover, it will be shown how the cultural definitions and treatments of disease in colonial Asante include perceptions and existential dilemmas which are historically unique. (Warren: 1974, p. 433-435; Obeng: 1996) As such, they defy schemes of comparison and of rational adaptation. This thesis is an

attempt to move beyond the western perspective of "us" and "them" in African concerns of healing and religion. As noted recently,

> it is only by abandoning the conceptual baggage anthropology inherits from colonial and imperial discourse that we are free to experience other worlds from the ground up, as it were, and recognize that many of the reified categories that still define our discourse--ritual, magic, totemism, witchcraft, lineage--are largely figments of our own intellectual imagination and have no counterparts in the vocabularies and views of those we study." (Jackson: 1996, p. 6)

Two letters from the spring of 1930 provide an introduction to Asante notions of religion and healing in colonial and pre-colonial periods. The first letter was written by the leading authority of the Catholic Church in the Colony. His plea is to the Colonial Secretary in Accra to enforce legislation making the expressions of witch finding and its associated practices illegal under the colonial government. Such movements appear to be affecting his congregation. The letter focuses on the affairs of a specific shrine at Suhum. The author sees the practitioner as an opportunist who wishes to extort money and to offend the Catholic Church.

> Honourable Colonial Secretary:
> 24 March, 1930
> Your Honour:
> It is my duty as Acting Head of the Roman Catholic Mission on the Gold Coast to report to Your Honour the unjust and revolting dealings of a certain fetish priest, who is enjoying great popularity since several months as "witch doctor" at Suhum, near Nsawam, in the Akim District.
> The pagans of the Gold Coast strongly do believe in witches. Thanks to the "witch doctor," since several months the number of the so called witches is greatly increasing. If a child dies, or if any accident happens, the family uses to consult the oracle to find out a "witch" who will be made responsible for their expenses and losses. The witch doctor of Suhum has become famous all along the Coast for his professional successes and it is now a quite common practice of the Native Tribunals here to refer witchcraft cases and other matters of the same nature to this imposter, who is doing a very lucrative business to the detriment of the poorer class of the country.

In many places, Catholics have been accused to be "witches" and were ordered to go to Suhum for the doctor's verdict.
This is against Christian and natural law.
Our religion forbids all such superstitious practices as sinful and unworthy of a Christian.
A Chief has no right to force a Christian to do anything against his conscience.
I have therefor issued to all those under my spiritual jurisdiction a strict prohibition to obey such orders, threatening the disobedient members with the severest punishment of the Church.
I have asked them, if ordered to go to Suhum, to seek for the protection of the nearest District Commissioner for necessary protection, and District Commissioners (in the Saltpond and Winnebah Districts) have given a very valuable assistance to our people, who were being brought by force to Suhum.
The actual state of affairs at Suhum cannot continue any longer, and I most respectfully approach Your Honour with a humble request to have a serious investigation made, and to deliver the country of the curse of this witch doctor on the following grounds:
1. The witch doctor of Suhum is a mere imposter whose business is dangerous for the public, disturbing peace and offending the religious feelings of the Christians of the Gold Coast.
2. The ultimate aim of the witch doctor of Suhum is but an extortion of money.
I beg to attach to this report a newspaper report about Suhum, and another one about Kukroo (Ashanti) where similar practices are going on.
I have the honour to be,
Honourable Sir,
Your most obedient Servant,
Joseph Strebler
Acting Head of the Catholic Mission, Gold Coast. (NAG: A.D.M.: 11/1051)

The second letter reads almost as a reply to the first. While it cannot be established that the authors of the second letter knew of Strebler's plea, it may be assumed that the government acted upon the requests made by Strebler. Thus, the villagers of Bekwai drafted their own appeal to the Secretary. Their letter contains testimony of the real intent and purpose of the shrine, and gives witness of their suspicions of those guilty of witching deaths of infants. This letter is included here because of its contents of religion and healing in regards to a witch finding shrine.

Honourable Sir:
30 April, 1930
Before the late Governor Guggisberg took over the government of the Gold Coast there was a serious infantile mortality and also a deplorable loss in mothers after child birth.
The incidence was so alarming that large sums of money were spent by the government on infant clinics and maternity hospitals in order to arrest the loss of life. These losses in infants and mothers are the work of witches all over the country. It is regrettable to remark that the majority of the witches are refuged in the Christian churches of the Colony, notably in the Wesleyan Churches of the Colony and Asanti. Recently the depredations of the witches are becoming so alarming that a certain big Fetish has been set up at Suhum and branches at other places to catch and punish these human devils. It is interesting to note that it is only through Fetish methods that these witches can be successfully caught and dealt with. It is rumored that the Christian Churches are trying to persuade government in order to interfere or put a stop to the actions of the Fetish.
We beg to ask Government not to do such a thing. The duty of the Christian Missions is to try to induce or to teach members to give up such evil practices, but if they are unable to do so the Suhum Fetish must stay to rid the country of such destructive beings.
An exhaustive enquiry by Government into the mystery of how and why women become witches will enable Government to understand the destructive powers of such people.
An attempt by the Christian Missions of the colony to induce the natives to give up such evil practices would have been far more beneficial to the country than their serious attempt to prohibit the liquor traffic. Liquor is not taking toll on infant life as witchcraft is doing at present.
Any representation by the Christian Missions must not be entertained. Government must use his own judgement in the matter.
We are,
Honourable sir,
(Villagers of Bekwai)
Well wishers of the country (NAG: A.D.M.: 11/1051)

These two letters are intended to help strengthen the argument of this section. The argument has two aspects. First, that healing in the Gold Coast Colony involved the uses of so called "fetish" shrines on a regular basis, and that this healing routinely involved ritual divining in order to carry out its purposes. Second, shrines themselves are not merely the results of disconcerting effects of western influences on local populations, most notably

the cocoa industry, and that such shrines pre-date European contact.

The effects of a modern economy and of western Christian influences have previously been used as sole basis for the rise and popularity of the shrines. One noted example of such an approach is Margaret Field. Field worked in the Gold Coast as medical staff for the colonial government in the 1930s. In Asante and in Brong, Field witnessed vast numbers of "fetish" shrines which were used for healing and for personal prosperity. Field then returned to England and explored further education in anthropology, sometimes under the tutelage of Meyer Fortes, in preparation to pursue an extended study of the shrines. Field proposed that conditions of modern economy based on trade in cocoa, and the conversion to Christianity by thousands of residents resulted in general conditions of anomie and loss of traditional identity. The most common symptoms of anomie were depression and schizophrenia. Witchcraft, in turn, serves as a kind of psychological relief for the feelings of guilt and estrangement felt under these new born anomic conditions. Some brief quotes from Field's study illustrate her points.

> Witchcraft meets, above all else, the depressive's need to steep herself in irrational self-reproach and to denounce herself as unspeakably wicked...Witchcraft exists only in fantasy, in the minds of certain mentally sick people, and is a bewilderment to others. It is therefore likely that, if Depression were to die out, belief in witchcraft would die out also. (Field: 1960, p. 38)

Fields' desire to prove her own European conceptions of mental illness in the Gold Coast is witnessed in another remark about the effects of literacy and western economy.

> Literate Africans, perhaps educated in Mission schools, accustomed to attend church on Sundays, employed as clerks, teachers, store keepers, and in a hundred other "detribalized" jobs, are frequently pictured by the European as being in a state of moral and religious "conflict." They are popularly accredited with "split minds"--minds supposedly rent in twain by the opposing pulls of tribal gods and the dictates

of Christianity. (Field: 1960, p. 52-53)

Field disregards any evidence of the historic and political realities of either witchcraft or anti-witching shrines. She sees the shrines as 20th century phenomena and as the result of anomie and depression brought about by new forms of economy and religion. "In Ashanti, as elsewhere in Ghana, very few of the shrines are ancient tribal establishments but are privately owned and have sprung up in response to a growing sense of insecurity which can be correlated with the expansion of the cocoa industry." (Field: 1960, p. 87) In this section I attempt to show how concerns over witches pre-date European contact, and that during the nineteenth century these concerns rose to greater levels just prior to Britsh overrule.

In 1817, the Kumase Adumhene Adum Ata recited the following account of the differences between Asante and Europeans. The story is recorded by Bowdich.

> In the beginning of the world, God created three white and three black men, with the same number of women; he resolved, that they might not afterwards complain, to give them their choice of good and evil. A large box or calabash was set on the ground, with a piece of paper, sealed up, on one side of it. God gave the black men the first choice, who took the box, expecting it contained every thing, but, on opening it, there appeared only a piece of gold, a piece of iron, and several other metals, of which they did not know the use. The white men opening the paper, it told them every thing. God left the blacks in the bush, but conducted the whites to the water side, (for this happened in Africa) communicated with them every night, and taught them to build a small ship which carried them to another country, when they returned after a long period, with various merchandise to barter with the blacks, who might have been the superior people. (Bowdich: 1966, p. 261-262)

Bowdich then provides commentary on the nature of Onyame, or the Supreme God of Asante. The absence of Onyame was a reality with which "not a shade of despondency is associated." Onyame issued justice as a final arbitrator largely in the affairs

of royalty, but even this form of intervention was mostly remote and so unpredictable that it was never cause for lament or fear. Intervention by Onyame, noted Bowdich, "diminishes their comforts and their endowments on earth."

It was before birth and after death that the power and control of Onyame had its most determining effects in Asante. The identity of royalty continued to be associated with Onyame and his domain even after their death. Kings and other members of the higher class continued to dwell with the supreme deity after death, "enjoying an eternal renewal of the state and luxury they possessed on earth." (Bowdich: 1966, p. 262) To reinforce this lasting relationship, a number of slaves of either gender are sacrificed at the death of kings. They served to accompany the deceased and to administer to their pleasures. Conversely, the dead of non royalty remained in a state of "torpid indulgence," which serves to recompense them for the "drudgery of their lives, and which is truly congenial to the feelings of the Negro." (Bowdich: 1966, p. 262)

Before birth, Onyame assigned to each person his or her ɔkrabea. The word is derived from two Twi words: ɔkra, message, and bea, which means manner or the way of doing something. ɔkrabea literally means the manner of the message. In Asante, the terms has come to mean the message given by Onyame to the individual person. This message was thereby meant to inform the kind of life that individual would live as an embodied human person. This feature of life for all Asante is best understood as fate or destiny, and shares many features in common with the same concept in other West African societies. (Fortes: 1983; Jackson: 1982, p. 21-25; Riesman: 1990; Riesman: 1992) ɔkrabea was further related to the Twi concept of ordered destiny administered from Onyame. Or, "it might be bindingly

approved by him after being recited in his presence by an individual who was about to be born into corporeal existence." (McCaskie: 1995, p. 107) The former concept was identified as hyɛbea, which is derived from hyɛ, to fix, and bea, manner. Thus, the Asante concept of destiny could be considered either as self determined or as divinely ordained, but never both.

In witchcraft, the body as well as a person's ɔkrabea may be threatened. The body may be made seriously ill or even killed. But ɔkrabea and ɔkra may not be destroyed. However, both may be impaired, and thereby harm or disturb both the relation of the person within the lineage and the person's sense of being within humanity and the state. In this case, the place of the individual within history may be disrupted or even eliminated. "The body falls victim to the witchcraft, but the ɔkrabea which is granted by the Supreme Being, associated with the parting messages each person receives as he or she leaves the presence of Nyame, cannot be destroyed." In the case of witchcraft, ritual may be performed "which reintegrates the person whose ɔkrabea might have been threatened by the mishap. The ritual repositions the person and allows her/him to reunite with the group." (Pashington Obeng: personal communication, 1997)

According to Gyeke there is always only a "single message" in the Akan notion of destiny. Whether ɔkrabea is pronounced by Onyame, or whether it was negotiated by the individual in the presence of Onyame, there is never a contradiction between the two. Gyeke interprets this summation to mean that ɔkrabea is legitimized only by Onyame, and that a person's own sense of ɔkrabea or hyɛbea shows no difference between the two concepts of fate and destiny. These concepts determine only the broad sweeping conditions of a person's life, never the specific details. (Gyeke: 1995, p. 108-119)

However, it may be noted that given the perceived distance between human persons and Onyame, this concept of destiny often lacked any firm notion of divine manifestations in the lives of individuals. But even though a person's ɔkrabea cannot be readily known by any individual, including the person himself, Asante are never completely resigned to the notion of lack of free will and agency. In addition, they have always been aware of the problem of evil and are certain of its origins. These include the lesser mystical powers, or abosom. Numbered in this immense and varied category are all supernatural forces such as magical powers, witches (obayifoo), etc. Evil also includes mankind's desire or will to comply or cooperate with these forces. Thus, unlike Onyame, abosom are not wholly good and have the potential to injure and create chaos among mortals. Yet evil also arises from the character and agency of human persons. Asante believe that nothing evil, such as witchcraft, comes from Onyame. Rather, evil is the result of one's own agency and will. "Evil comes from man's tiboa," or conscience, said one of Gyeke's informants. Tiboa enables each person to see the difference between right and wrong. Thus, in Asante cosmology, "evil stems from the exercise by the person of his or her own free will, onipa ne pe." (Gyeke: 1995, p. 127) We will see in chapter four how accusation of witchcraft were historically linked with illness and death, and how this use of witchcraft is tied in with Asante ideas of tiboa and agency.

Evil and chaos in the world also have their origins with a personage recognized as sasabonsam, or "evil one." This character was described to me as the "Asante devil." It is encountered in the bush, beyond the limits of cultural space. Sasabonsam does not defy physical description, as abosom often do; and its physical features resemble, in part,

those of human persons. Therefore, it is a mongrel of half human half non-human. Its existence is that of a predator on human affairs; and it is sometimes considered to be in compliance with, and a servant of abosom. It is never sympathetic to the human (i.e. mortal) condition; and it considered to be only evil, incapable of doing good. Sasabonsam seizes the opportunity to threaten the social order and to bring suffering into the lives of persons.

Captain Rattray provides ample contextual description of sasabonsam as a figure which lives in and derives its qualities (powers?) from the bush. The nature of sasabonsam was profoundly anti-human, and placed itself in opposition to the social order. When abosom refused or failed to control this enmity, sasabonsam leveled his acrimony towards society and towards individuals by encouraging and inciting bayi (witchcraft.) This was most often manifest through illness and by death. This mystical resolution was quite often directed at those religious figures who were the mortal servants of abosom, the akɔmfoɔ. The symbolism of sasbonsam was, therefore, precise. His physical and willful personal was a negative image of that which was humanly Asante. Its habitation in the bush gives evidence of its dangerous and sinister likeness. It is

> a monster which is said to inhabit parts of the dense virgin forests. It is covered with long hair, has large blood-shot eyes, long legs, and feet pointing both ways. It sits on high branches of an odun or onyina tree and dangles its legs, with which at times it hooks up the unwary hunter. It is hostile to man, and is supposed to be especially at enmity with the real priestly class. Hunters who go to the forest and are never heard of again--as sometimes happens--are supposed to have been caught by sasabonsam. All of them are in league with abayifo (witches), and with mmoatia, in other words, with the workers in black magic. (Rattray: 1927, p. 28)

The man from whom I acquired a bronze statue of sasabonsam was a Muslim with an Asante mother and a Fulani father. He told me that sasabonsam causes illness and

death only on Asante, and it is "not connected to witchcraft." He recognized his Fulani lineage and identity more than his Asante one, and considered sasabonsam ineffective in his life. However, this view was not held by any Asante with whom I spoke. One Asante man and one Asante woman, both in their fifties, couched sasabonsam in more immediately local terms. "Sasabonsam is evil. He causes someone to do evil. He causes bayi." At least half a dozen other Asante who spoke of sasabonsam also did not equivocate in their descriptions of its ability to cause bayi. These perspectives are significant in that they view the human order subject to the meddling of sasabonsam, abosom, and other supernatural forces as one which is Asante created and lived. These forces appear to have little efficacy beyond the limits of Asante. Even someone whose mother was Asante, but whose own identity was Muslim, considered these forces to be of a limited effect. However, by all Asante accounts, sasabonsam was considered the antithesis of human life. Even his personage speaks of exaggerated human features. These include a head, limbs and hair which appear distorted, a protruding and erect phallus, and a body which is out of proportion with the head, legs and arms. These features maintain the characterization of sasabonsam as a mystical force which is beyond the restraint and limits of human, or man made, existence. There is little question among those Asante who freely described sasabonsam to me that his dealings with human persons represent a mockery of mortal life, particularly its physical dimensions.

In nineteenth century Asante religion, every deity required a temporary abode and a priest. The widely fluctuating group of deities known as abosom (singular:ɔbosom) has been identified as lesser gods, tutelary spirits and "fetishes." Abosom are the children of Onyame, even though many do not conform to the ultimate goodness which is identified

with Onyame. Their interventions in the affairs of mankind are arbitrary and unilateral. They represent the powers of nature, rather than the domain of culture. Each ɔbosom is therefore identified with a specific point of origin within the natural world. This identity produced a broad system of classification of abosom within three general categories. These categories were recounted to Meyer Fortes in 1946.

> 1. Atano. These were powers that derived from water, and principally rivers. The subdivision was named for the river Tano in northwestern Asante, which was in itself the source of numerous, important manifestations of the abosom. Such manifestations, which were disseminated throughout Asante, were popularly known by the abbreviated term taa ( der. Tano) and were further classified by the day of their revelation; Taa (Tano) Kwabena (Tuesday); Taa (Tano) Kofi (Friday), etc. The atano protected the community (culture) but were vengeful if shown disrespect.
> 2. Ewim. These were powers that derived from the sky (ewim.) They were commonly understood as being unbending, judgmental, and merciless when crossed. They were very frequently anthropomorphized as abrafoɔ or adumfoɔ (executioners.) They were held to have a special relationship with sasabonsam, a forest-being that devoured hunters.
> 3. Abo. These were powers that derived from the forest, in the broadest sense of whatever grew wild (wura.) The word bo meant simply a rock or stone (compare the diviner's abo - lumps, 'things',) and was a common locus of this class of manifestation. The abo were held to have a special relationship with mmoatia, small, trickster-like denizens of the forest; hence, ɔbo yɛ mmoatia bosom (ɔbo is the ɔbosom of the mmoatia.) They were particularly associated with the power of healing." (MF/ASSM: "The Origin of "Abosom": a Talk with Kwasi Broni, Fetish Priest of Taa Kojo of Asokwa." (MF: ASSM, 1946a)

All abosom were distinct from and held greater power and prestige than the lesser mystical forces known as asuman. This category of mystical powers included charms, amulets, talismans, fetishes, and so forth. Each held a specific influence and notoriety; and each did not operate entirely on its own, but was a manifestation of a greater source of supernatural power. Meyer Fortes noted that the "Difference between suman and abosom: The abosom gets its power from Onyame, has a priest and hold sway over a group or family,

clan, etc. The suman is a personal charm, derives power from fairies, monsters, witches, spirit trees, etc. It is used to control powers, but not for evil ends." (MF/ASSM: "Reading notes on Ashanti," (n.d.)). In nineteenth century Asante, abosom manifest their powers through their own will, and could be neither manipulated nor purchased with money. By contrast,

> nsuman" are lower and behave as messengers of a temporary nature. Abosom can give instructions for the making of a suman which is lower order of spirit beings operating through little jujus ... Nsuman can be bought. Not so in the case of abosom...The Ashantis serve the abosom but single individuals keep nsuman for their own private purposes. Some abosom have nsuman about them which are used as messengers. Abosom generally can explain by oracles certain complicating problems (and nsuman cannot) ... The abosom operate for a much longer time. Nsuman have a temporary purpose. They are very revengeful indeed. They borrow their power from lower, lower things which can act without reasoning properly. Nsuman are good or bad. Abosom can be good and bad. (MF: ASSM, 1946b.)

Identities and powers of the three classes of abosom were made known among human persons usually through "mounting" or taking possession of persons of either gender. Asante who were thus seized began a lengthy and devoted training of seven years to become priests, after which time the priest is considered to be "wedded" to the particular bosom which initiated the possession. During this period of training, the initiate will undergo repeated sessions of bathing, mixing medicines, dancing, possession, abstinence from sexual activities, observance of assorted dietary and ethical taboos, and ritual recitations. (Rattray: 1927, p. 38-47) These activities were designed to allow the prophetic authority and interventionist capacities of the abosom to work more fully through the new priest. It is believed that humans ultimately had no control over the interventions of abosom. At the end of the training, the successful adept emerges as ɔkɔmfoɔ, or "one possessed," but more

commonly rendered as "priest."

As with Onyame, the origins of abosom were relayed within myths. The apprenticeship of abosom involved mastering a ritual dance known as akɔm. This dance will allow mystical intervention into human concerns, and it may only be performed successfully by abosom. This intervention was established sometime during the mythical past. According to one of the informants of Fortes:

> What ever might compose abosom none can correctly tell. Twumasi was probably a young man. One day people observed him behaving very much like a mad man. He had been possessed by a certain power but the people with whom he lived did not know that he was becoming a medium of expression of an entity. After a spell of time Twumasi's state got normal. Then he people realized that it must be a new state or condition. Akɔm was what they were taught by the power of obsession to call Twumasi's state. So the proverb came about: "Had Twumasi not gone mad and then normal again, there would not have come akɔm or abosom worship. (Anonymous: ASSM: n.d.a)

Basic to the nineteenth century Asante religion was the structural relationship between the space of culture and the space of nature. This relationship was personified in the attention given by priests and their clients to abosom. As mentioned, abosom were positioned in and as representatives of nature. They were thus outside the boundaries of human society, but were constantly searching for ways to invade the domain of culture. Intrusions by malevolent abosom took many forms, but were most notable through illness, unfortunate and random events, and death. Such powers were manifested through their own volition and via an intractable point of origin. But always they came from beyond the boundaries of domesticated space and cultural domains. As a result, their powers were considered as great danger and as a threat to human relations and to the personhood of individuals. Indeed, common individuals were at the mercy of such powers. Control and

restraint of these interventionist forces was acknowledged as being under the mystical abilities of akɔmfoɔ. Aside from akɔmfoɔ, no greater counter measures could be relied upon, for it was widely acknowledged that abosom were impossible to domesticate and restrain by means of culture.

Asante comprehension of these issues has been conveyed in stories concerning particular cases. One such case was relayed by an Asante man to Meyer Fortes. It is an account of the powers of atano in the form of Taa (Tano). The events happened during the reign of the Asantehene Kofi Kakari (1867-1874) in the village of Ade beba.

> One evening in the days of Karikari, in the little village of Ad beba, a globe of light was seen on a Gyedua tree in the center of the village. Vultures flew about. There were noises and whistling in the air. The old people then rushed for drums which began to play. Voices began to cry out and a band of musicians set forth ak m mwom, or songs of fetish dances. The community was trying to capture an entity that wanted to come and stay with them and protect them. They did not know the kind whether Tanno, or Obo or Kobi, a common manifestation, River or Wood or Sky. The power of something yet invisible was moving like a bird from place to place. The King of Asante was informed. He sent sheep and long practiced "akomfo" to help in welcoming the new entity that was seeking to come down. A brass pan was procured. A little water was put in it. The noise directed this. The old priests called out for his name. He answered he came from River Tanno and was called Tanno Kwabena Benna. Great ballad singers were then sent for. They extolled the phenomenon in befitting praise. The fetish then called out: "Are you ready to receive me?" ... At last, after a good number of sheep and fowls had been sacrificed a meteor of light whistling through the air swiftly alighted and fell into the pan. It called out "Who will come and receive me?" One man, Kofi Ketewa, went up, embraced the pan to have it covered according to orders. He was scalded all over the body from the chest to the belly. He was reputed to be a very strong man. He did not live long. He shot himself. The fetish then obsessed a woman who died in 1943. (MF/ASSM, 1945f.)

Such experiences are extremely abundant in the historical record. Colonial and historical descriptions show that in the first half of the twentieth century such shrines and ritual attempts to counter-act the unwarranted effects of spirits were ubiquitous. The two

letters from 1930 which began this section demonstrate the ritual efficacy which was then placed in healing abilities of the shrines. There is also some evidence that the colonial administration actually legitimized such shrine practices. But these shrines are clearly antecedent to Europeans. Beecham observed in the 1830s:

> The influence of the fetishmen rests upon the universally received principle, that whatever evils afflict men are produced by supernatural means, and can only be counteracted or removed by supernatural agency;--in other words, that evils can only be removed, and desired benefits conferred, by the fetishes; and that their fiendly interposition must be sought through the medium of their servants or ministers. (Beecham: 1968, p. 190-191)

Such observances were widely reported in many missionary and administrative official journals. Witnessing such extreme manifestations of "supernaturalism" usually inspired reflection on the process itself and on the ritual authorities who performed the ceremonies. Beecham continues in his review: "This doctrine, it will be perceived, puts the people completely into the power of the priesthood, and wholly abandons them as victims to its rapacity."

Swithenbank notes how shrines were part of the Asantahene's palace in the early nineteenth century. The Royal Mausoleum, burned to the ground by the British in 1895, was a repository not only of the bones of eight Asanti kings, but also of several shrines for akɔmfoɔ who were in the employ of the palace court. Moreover, Swithenbank provides some architectural evidence that many villages surrounding Kumasi in the nineteenth century were constructed according a similar plan. Each house formed part of a court yard. The yard opened into a consecutive building or room which was built for purposes of housing a shrine dedicated to the local ɔbosom. These buildings were elaborate

constructions of cane and timber walls with thatched roofing. Skilled artisan workings were sculpted into internal furnishings and the shrine itself. During ritual, only akɔmfoɔ and their attendants were allowed into the shrine. Other rooms adjoining the shrine were used in preparation of ceremonial food which was to be consumed by akɔmfoɔ and by the abosom. (Swithenbank: 1969, p. 1-13)

The account of Dutchman William Bosman in 1704 corroborates the historicity of the shrines and of akɔmfoɔ. Like many accounts of Europeans in West Africa, Bosman provides a lengthy description of the conditions and reasons for ritual performances at the shrines. These were given, he says, in times of hostile weather, such as droughts or floods. Performances were also made when fishing was poor, in preparation for war, at times of long distance travel, "to drive a bargain," or on appointed days of the week dedicated to the particular deity. The ubiquity of the shrines was noted by Bosman. He stated that, "they have a great number of False Gods; that each Man, or at least each House-keeper, hath one." Certainly each community carried on its own religious customs of shrine rituals.

> Almost every Village hath a small appropriated Grove, where the Governours and chief People frequently repair to make their Offerings; either for the public good, or for themselves. These Groves are esteemed Sacred, no Person presuming to defile them, pluck, cut or break off any Branches of Trees; who, besides the accustomed Punishment, is not willing to lay himself under an universal Malediction. (Bosman: 1967, p. 153)

Just over a century later, Bowdich noticed, "every family has a variety of domestic fetishes, furnished by the priests." These he compared to ancient forms of deity, such as that found in Egypt or Rome because of the desire to sacrifice on certain days of the week. As is evident in the colonial records on cases of public morality and mystical

detection, Bowdich noticed the use of shrines in the pursuit of those accused of theft.

> When any one denies a theft, an aggry bead is placed in a small vessel, with some water, the person holding it puts his right foot against the right foot of the accused, who invokes the power of the bead to kill him if he is guilty, and then takes it into his mouth with a little of the water, the rest being thrown on the ground, and crossed as he repeats the invocation. (Bowdich: 1966, p. 267)

In 1926, the shrines were referred to as fetishes by the colonial administration and by Asante themselves. One century after Bowdich describes the shrines, an account is given of a fetish shrine known as baduwa, which was located in Foso village in Asante. The fetish was reported to "act as a guardian angel" for the village. Its fame arose "during the influenza epidemic of 1918." In this account, fetish powers are described in three different functions.

> a. If some of the "fetish" is put into a bottle and placed in a cocoa farm, the fetish is said to assure a good crop of cocoa. With regard to this function I should think that it is akin to the "Anhwire" fetish of Foso.
> b. The fetish mixture is used as it were, for baptising children, who then become immune from sickness. Women in travail are washed with it and are said to bring forth immediately; sores and abrasions are healed. A girl of Baduwa village came forward and showed me her leg which she said had been cured by the fetish. There certainly was a scar on her leg which suggested a quite recently healed wound. In the sacred grove people bathe in the fetish; the men, if they have no shame, are naked, but the women never strip. While this takes place people stand round singing, but there is no dancing.
> c. It is also taken as a drink. Thomas Kofie informed me that he was sick at Atonsu and sent for some of this fetish. On its arrival and on drinking it, he felt very much better and soon recovered. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/47/1908)

This observation given by a British administrator shows that well into the twentieth century shrines were used for a multiplicity of mystical tasks. Prosperity, childbirth, healing, and baptism are among four different purposes for utilizing shrines as directly observed in this memorandum of 1918. Varied uses of shrines in the nineteenth and

into the twentieth century provide a strong indication of the nature of Asante cosmology, and of Asante religious responses to the forces considered to be beyond the realm of practical existence. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these forces were identified as abosom.

As mentioned, abosom were supernatural in character. Abosom lived in nature; and this existence stood in opposition to culture, or human created existence. In Asante thought, nature was itself unpredictable and chaotic. Abosom were therefore notorious in their capacity to be intractable and menacingly evasive in their provocations. They were ambiguous and duplicitous. At times, abosom were positioned to assist and aid society and individuals. Yet, at other times, they could be spiteful and threatening; and they were considered a danger to the social order. They were known to be unpredictable, capable of ridicule and derision, deceitful, treacherous, and full of vengeance. Perhaps their most notable ploy was causing and exacerbating illness within humans. These uncertainties constituted the microcosm that formed an immediate relationship between the realm of nature and of mystical entities with its ubiquitous capacity for harm, and the realm of human culture and society in which Asante lived.

The forest zone surrounded Kumase and other villages of the Asante state. Europeans remarked of the difficulty of traveling even a few kilometers over paths which rose and fell, and twisted through dense forest. By contrast, Kumase and Asante towns and villages were renown for their cleanliness and order. However, like most settlements, Kumase was subject to cycles of architectural and urban decay. Missionaries varied in their remarks of the appearance of Kumase buildings and streets. At times it appeared clean, while just years later Kumase had fallen into disrepair. In 1874, the city was in near ruin

after the military and political problems of the decade. In the 1880s, the whole kingdom was in a state of unrest over rival candidates to the throne and sika dwa kofi. Grass grew on every empty street in the capital.

The Asante settlement was established within moral, as well as geographical, space. In Asante cosmology, the settlement or community was the order world of culture. Within it were found evidence of human culture, namely, the matrilineage and political structure, including a chief. Conversely, the dense, black forest was the unordered domain of untamed and terrifying beings. These entities had no place in the space of community. The geographic realm of the wild had unharnessed power. Its powers represented unlimited danger to Asante society and to individual Asante in the forms of illness and ruin.

Settlement and space within all Asante towns and villages reflected the polarity between forest and community. Main streets were kept spotless. They were meticulously swept each day. On ritual occasions, loose dirt was removed to the outskirts and placed on paths to alleviate mystical danger and such as disease or death.

Every Asante community raised a tree as a symbol of the settlement. Trees were symbolic of the monarchy and of community in Akan societies. (Platvoet: 1985) In Asante communities, trees were planted by the chief. Heads of military opponents were brought back to the town and buried under the main tree. The tree also provided shade, and shade was symbolic to the political power of Asante. Shade also brought "coolness" to the community, and protected against the "hot" powers of the wild, including witches. Trees were icons of spirituality and of political power. (McLeod: 1981, p. 30)

Many Asante chiefs imported mystically powerful objects or medicines to

protect the town or help it prosper. Some of these were located at the center of the town. Others were kept at its margins. This structure was noted in the mid nineteenth century. "Elevated on four poles at the end of the village .. a Fetish house." (Ramseyer and Kuhne: 1875, p. 54) Village marginal areas were a critical part of Asante moral space. They were kurotia, and represented the limits of the human community and the beginning of danger. Thus, at margins of the town were located huts for menstruating women, latrines, graveyards, middens, and shrines.

The midden was the burial site for certain categories of individuals who lacked full personhood or who were dangerous. These included babies, those who died before puberty, men or women who were sterile, executed criminals, those whose experienced "bad" death, and witches. Village margins were thus places where witches washed their own children and initiated them into witchcraft. This washing was directly contrary to the cleanliness of community and to the removal of dirt from an ordered settlement. Village margins were thus occupied by persons and activities which represented the transition from community into the wild zone or the forest. The forest was occupied by dangerous beasts, mystical entities known as abosom, little fairies, and witches.

Imagery which contrasted community and bush, including the pollution and danger of the later, was abundantly manifest. The pollution of souls required periodic cleansing. The annual state and village performances of odwira included rituals of purification of the state's political and administrative elite, and thus of every other Asante. Spatial and community boundaries also reflected this absolute division. Thus pollution of all sorts was removed and expelled without the village. "To make musu means to do a

custom out of doors to remove evil (such as the sweeping of the influenza out of the town with suyme brooms and making a barrier across the road with the brooms to keep it out.)" (MJF: EMP)

Images of the sacred powers of abosom were abundant throughout Asante in the nineteenth century. These were found mostly in shrines or in elaborate buildings dedicated to the spirits called abosomfie. These icons of abosom consisted of brass containers which held the revealed aspects of the abosom, including "a few lumps of gold and other matter made into a lump — tails of tiger, wolf and buffalo joined together," (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/430) bowls of water taken from sacred pools or streams, pebbles, sticks and the entrails of animals, especially chickens. Surrounding this assortment were herbal and other medicines, or aduro, brass figures, small clubs, animal parts and other materials. Aduro refers to any sort of medicine: western, herbalist, or fetish.

In a Tigare shrine which I visited near Cape Coast, I witnessed two altars used in the divination and healing of illnesses. One altar was positioned outside the shrine, and was fashioned in a cubical manner with an opening on the lower half of the structure too small for an adult to pass through. Inside the shrine, the altar contained a wide assortment of icons used in divination and healing. There were bananas, a sword, several empty bottles of liquor, coins and paper currency, yams, bowls filled with rotted materials, a red plastic tea pot, matted hair formed in braids and other assorted objects.

In the nineteenth century, these shrines were built on the margins of villages and towns in the ambiguous zone known as kurotia, or kuro means "village" and tia means "boundary."This area marked the transition from community to bush, or from culture to

nature. This was also the area in which akɔmfoɔ were customarily buried, and which many of them kept some kind of residence while alive. In this manner, Swithenbank records how the temple of Taa (Tano) Abenamu Subunu was built at Abirim outside the principal portion of the town. The Tano shrine was constructed in the usual manner of four buildings surrounding the building with the shrine. The ɔbosom was noted to have been brought to Abirim by an ɔkɔmfɔ named Afua, a priestess chosen sometime during the reign of Osei Tutu at the beginning of the eighteenth century. (Swithenbank: 1969, p. 23)

A letter from the Commissioner of Police, Cape Coast, dated July 31, 1922, includes detail on the religious images witnessed at a Hew-me-so shrine. These included jaw and arm bones of humans, "drums, urns, calabashes and the idol like figures, also knives." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

Caretakers of these shrines, or akɔmfoɔ, were the chosen servants of abosom. They were persons who were thus given the unique aptitude to witness and comprehend affairs of the spirits. This included the ability to extend beyond the domains of society into the space of nature, or the bush. As persons chosen and possessed by the particular abosom, akɔmfoɔ were, by extension, marginal beings. They lived within Asante society, but were capable of encountering nature in ways which other Asante could not. This equivocated identity was articulated in social status in a variety of ways. Asante acknowledged akɔmfoɔ as being capable of accessing the powers of nature, especially as these powers were manifest in the lives of particular persons. The priests were thus capable of divination. As such, "Asante divination was essentially minatory; it dealt in pessimistic texts about the future of individual supplicants." (McCaskie: 1995, p. 105) In this regard, divination reveals what is

hidden and concealed, and thus dangerous. "Divination is clearly another such truth constructing process in which, through the public reclassification of people and events, a particular interpretation emerges as the authorized version of "what really happened." (Shaw: 1991, p. 140) Akɔmfoɔ were thereby persuaded to assist all others in personal travails of life: illuminating the unforeseen, edifying the unknown, charting estrangement and disaffection, purging threat, frailty and fear, and dissolving enigma and intractability.

In such moments of crisis, "people most dramatically bring into focus and negotiate a sense of meaning for their lives." (Jackson and Karp: 1990, p. 28) Religion in nineteenth century Asante directly addressed such concerns. Chapter four will present further detail of the experiences encountered by persons who presumed themselves to be victims of the ubiquitous attacks of nature and of abosom during British overrule in the Gold Coast. We will see how illness was perceived as an intrusion of the wild into the human community. We will also see how illness effects were perceived by both Asante and the British. However, it is first necessary to understand the nature of social change which occurred in Asante from 1820 to 1880.

**2.4 Economy and Society, 1820-1880**

Meyer Fortes has commented on how the ideology of the sacred, and ritual validation, "infused all Asante politico-jural and moral institutions." At one end of the spectrum, the state and individual Asante had mystical identification with the sika dwa kofi. The Golden Stool represented ultimate political power and the spirit of the state. Welfare of individual Asante survived as long as the Stool was held intact. At the other end of the spectrum, "the elementary relations of kinship, descent, and locality had mystical projection

in ancestral stools, lineage gods, deities associated with rivers and forests, and local taboos, as well as in mystical beliefs concerning the physical and psychical constitutions of the person." (Fortes: 1969, p. 153) Breach of oath and political office, as well as the defilement of sacred relics, were considered in 1820 to be a politico-jural delict and an act of sacrilege. Punishment for such a crime was immediate execution. In this section, we will see how these relations changed within Asante society in the nineteenth century, and how the sika dwa kofi was transformed.

Asante economy has rarely been the subject of study in and of itself. Scholars who have considered Asante history, such as Wilks, Fortes, and Busia, have reviewed economy only as it has been relevant to politics or the rise of long distance trade and the growth of the Asante polity. Little is known about Asante economy prior to the second half of the nineteenth century. The economy was growing at this time as is indicated by the adoption of units of gold dust as currency throughout the territories of the Asante Union in the days of Osei Tutu, around 1712.

In the nineteenth century, the primary sources of economy were agriculture and related economies such as hunting, fishing, mining, trading and marketing. Arhin has argued that sufficient data from the nineteenth century shows that a peasant economy existed prior to British occupation. He claims this on several grounds. First, the urban development of centers such as Kumasi provided a culture which was substantially different from the culture of surrounding villages and towns. The basis of an urban economy was realized in long distance trade between forest and savanna, and in urban market centers. (Clark: 1994) Secondly, there was an extraction of surplus by the state of rural incomes. This amounted

to an exploitation of farming and other rural economies in order to provide financial upkeep for the expanding state organization. The complex array of offices within Asante required dutiful tribute to be paid by the increasing numbers of farmers and citizens who were found to be under its administrative control. (Arhin: 1983, p. 475)

Outside of Kumase, Asante farmers held rights of cultivation within corporate bodies, such as lineages, whose members acquired title to land through enterprise, effective occupation, and state grants. These rights in land were upheld by local political authorities and by regional councils. Land was used to cultivate kola and other cash crops. These were used as currency and trade products in long distance market trading. Married couples often farmed together. However, the majority of Asante farming households were based on the idea that the husbands wealth was used by him alone, while the wife's wealth was to be shared be the entire household. This modes of transaction led to unstable marriages in Asante, a fact common to many farming societies in Africa. Enduring relations were found more commonly within the lineage, or between mother and child, than between husband and wife. (Clark: 1994)

Wealth and accumulation of material resources played a significant role in the lives of all Asante in the nineteenth century. Both of these ideas, which were not limited to the domain of the economy, became the measure for enormous social transformation from within Asante society. The effects of this transformation became most noticeable in the later decades of the century. We will see that at this time, in the 1880s, witch findings were first noticed in the historic record. The argument presented here and in chapter four is that the collapse of central state ideologies led to increases in social innovation, compromise,

confusion, and discontinuity. These forces were equally matched by uncertainty, unreason and doubt within individuals. Much of the data presented in this section synthesizes the approach and argument on nineteenth century Asante given by T.C. McCaskie. (1983; 1986)

As mentioned above, a gold standard was created in the seventeenth century as both a form of currency and as a means of transforming the early makings of the Asante state, with an emphasis on hunting and gathering, into an agricultural mode of production. This was done by converting gold into the accumulation of labor and produce in a sedentary setting. (Wilks: 1978) Labor was supplied by unfree slaves, most of whom were taken during military conquests. The early objects of accumulation were gold, people (slaves), land and food. Moreover, it was the symbolic, as well as material, use of gold which stipulated the means of social differentiation with the early state. Gold was a resource in whatever form it could be acquired: gold dust, gold nuggets, or displayed in ornaments and jewelry. Gold was thus located at the symbolic and economic center of the Asante state.

By the nineteenth century, the state had become centralized in Kumase. The size of the kingdom reached nearly present day Ghana. Kumase was connected by four main roads to northern cities of Timbuktu, Jenne, Segu, and Gao. These routes flourished with trade in gold, kola nuts, leather goods, silks, sheep and manufactured goods. Kumase was linked to the coastal ports of Cape Coast, Elmina, Winneba and Accra also by four main roads. To the South, trade was in palm oil, ivory, and weapons. Commerce was routed through Kumase, and was strictly controlled by the state. By 1770, neighboring traders were no longer allowed to pass through Asante for purposes of trade. (Haskett: 1981, p. 167)

By the end of the eighteenth century, specialized government functions were

assigned to bureaucratic committees in Kumase. The city became the center of political and economic activity while chiefs from outlying areas were reduced to senior status with relatively limited political power. As noted by Lewin, by 1900 "Kumase became the apex of the extensive political and military hierarchy and focal point of legal, economic, and religious life for one-half million residents of the metropolitan region." (Lewin: 1978, p. 14) Kumase became the "nerve center of the imperial system." The city was a center of political and commercial activity of the entire state. Its citizens were "always conscious that their town was the center from which all power and authority flowed." (Lewin: 1978, p. 14) Political activities in Kumase became increasingly centered on power and money, and on the ability to actively negotiate, maneuver and threat in terms of power and influence. By 1800, every aspect of power within the Asante state was controlled by persons and concerns within Kumase.

Large scale changes in Asante began in the 1830s with the reign of Asantehene Kwaku Dua Panin, 1834-1867. These changes dealt mostly with the accumulation of wealth, which had heretofore been considered as something social rather than individual. In other words, all material accumulation in Asante had been viewed as that which endowed the state with perpetuity. This change was manifest in the conscientious performance of duties rendered toward ancestors and to the historic preservation of the state as symbolized by the unborn. Thus, at the death of a man of status and wealth, ɔbirɛmpɔn, or "big man," his wealth passed from the hands of individuals into the corporation of the state. This wealth then belonged to the nation. It was acquired by the Asanteman. It was therefore transferred to the Asantehene, who was viewed as the custodian of the sika dwa

kofi. The Golden Stool, in turn, was believed to embody the continuity of historic culture and the spiritual essence, sunsum, of all Asante.

This wealth was acquired by the state through a legal maneuver known as awunnyade. This concept, according to McCaskie, was known as one's "death duties." But its meaning conveys more than this phrase. "The practice of awunnyade is essentially to be understood as a settling of accounts with history, the final item in the ledger that indicated the relative degree of the individual's success in contributing beyond his own gratification to the maintenance, enlargement and continuity of the realm of culture." (McCaskie: 1983, p. 34) This wealth was thereby redistributed to appointed or natural heirs; or it was apportioned out to other individuals. While there was likely dissension to this practice, it provides an illustration of how the individual was identified with the collective in matters of wealth and accumulation. However, this system changed forever during the reign of Kwaku Dua Panin (1834-1867). This change occurred in several ways.

First, the state under Kwaku Dua Panin "seriously, consistently and publicly breached the understood parameters of its relationship with the social order." (McCaskie: 1983, p. 35) The government of Asante became identified with measures of extreme and partisan injustices which violated its rights over the citizenry. The practice of awunnyade was abandoned. As a substitute, the government enforced the workings of a police state. This included unwarranted seizure of property, accusations and sequestrations of persons, and arbitrary trials and executions. No one was excluded from state harassment, except a small number of highly placed state officials. The result of these moves is that the government became identified with intimidation, control and the arbitrary and unjustified use

of force. Its ability to govern rapidly disappeared. The state "was liquidating its historic right to command society; and, in the process, it was devaluing received belief and behaviour." (McCaskie: 1983, p. 35)

Second, there was an historically unique opportunity for wide numbers of persons to obtain and acquire significant amounts of wealth. This accumulation was made possible through trade with Fante to the south, and with the British and Dutch. In previous times, the agents of the state were the primary beneficiaries of such trade. However, expansion of trade provided for the involvement of private entrepreneurs and the successful recovery of great wealth by increasing numbers of individual citizens. The government thus began illegal appropriations of wealth and property at an unprecedented moment in history when vast numbers of persons had significant amounts of wealth to be taken.

Third, at the historic sequence which conjoined illegal acts of government appropriation and brutality with the expansion of individual wealth and accumulation, Asante were being increasingly exposed to a new and alternative model of social and economic development. This model presented a new form of wealth and individual relation to the economy. This model was the competitive arena of free market and fiercely individualistic capitalism. It was first presented by the British in the area of the southern Gold Coast. Its sponsoring parties included the British government and Christianity.

This sequence of events and processes within a relatively short period of time yielded two consequences. First, certain state emissaries whose wealth was greatly enhanced by the campaign of violence and appropriation observed the difficulties of remaining within the boundaries of the Asante state. Many made plans to depart with their wealth and

resources into the British protectorate in hopes of asylum and political neutrality. Second, McCaskie asserts that the changes brought about by internal bias and external opportunity provided the seeds for social change of a revolutionary manner. Until the reign of Kwaku Dua Panin, he says, Asante remained a closed society. Previously, external forces of change were allowed only limited access into the dealings of the state and individual Asante. However, during the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, the circumstance of cultural isolation changed dramatically. It was during this period that Asante became exposed to and involved within expanding external systems of economy, religion and administration.

From the coastal south, the influence was felt through European economies, missions, and education. From the north, Muslims had become increasingly prevalent in trade and in the political economy of Kumase. Muslim religion and its healing traditions were also important to Asante political elite. Kwaka Dua had allowed the Muslims a greater economic, religious and medicinal place in Kumase than his predecessors. This was largely the result of the importation of the powers of Muslim charms and talismans in times of war and for healing. (Owusu-Ansah: 1991, p. 185)

The effects of this expansion would take several decades to reach full realization. However, within these decades the Asante state and society became radically and permanently divorced from its historic past. In cognitive and historic terms, "the generation of 1880 was further removed from that of 1830 than that generation had been from any of its predecessors throughout Asante history." (McCaskie: 1983, p. 36) In terms of this new world of the late nineteenth century, "these years represent a period of derangement, of innovation, of compromises and confusion, of false starts and hopes, and,

ultimately, of a decisive cognitive and materials shift that was beyond the control of a much weakened state." (McCaskie: 1983, p. 37)

Perhaps the most significant articulation of radical shifts in Asante was the twilight of its military. Johnson has estimated that the Asante army numbered as high as 100,000 in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. But after 1826, this number did not exceed 40,000. By 1860, the estimate is as low as 30,000; and at least half of these numbers were drawn from "tributaries and allies." (Johnson: 1978, p. 84) The military was defeated in 1874 by the British in the Anglo-Asante War.

The radical transitions during the life span of Kwaku Dua Panin were followed by attempts by his successors to alter these changes. These attempts took opposite polar directions. Successor kings of the later decades of the nineteenth century attempted to turn back the clock by dismantling the authoritarian rule of Kwaku Dua Panin. This course was attempted by his successor, Kofi Karikari (1867-1874). However, Karikari was proved incapable of managing the nation's substantial resources. He squandered the gold reserves on his wives and other women, who he regularly commissioned to dance before him. Personal excesses of the king and the protracted war of 1874 "left the Asante kingdom completely impoverished by 1874." (Aidoo: 1972, p. 165) Moreover, the following Asantehene Mena Bonsu (1874-1883) lacked the political abilities to control the state over which he presided. In view of his political ineptitude, he ordered the ordered the execution of any young men who criticized or challenged his ability to govern. His excesses also included extortions, heavy fines, and seduction of the wives of influential political elite.

Lesser political figures of the 1880s and 1890s pursued social reunification

at more intellectual or modernistic levels. Aidoo notes that after Kwaka Dua I, chiefs of the confederate states had grown in power in contrast to the increasing deficiencies and weaknesses of the Asante kings. By the late sixties, a small group of Kumase leaders acquired enough power that they became a dominant force in Asante politics. (Aidoo: 1972, p. 165) These included the chiefs of Asafo and rich gold district and Bantama, the seat of the treasury and of the royal mausoleum. As a result of growing strides for power, the king had an impossible task of balancing the power of the king with other factions of chiefs.

But there were attempts to restore an abandoned world based on the new blueprint provided by European ideas. By the early years of Mensa Bonsu's reign, it was clear that a group of Kumase chiefs had gained control of Kumase political power. By doing so, they controlled Asante. In 1876, the Methodist missionary Picot wrote, "It is not the King who rules but two or three of the Chiefs, and the King is very much afraid of them. They put him in office and can put him down again." (Cited in Aidoo: 1972, p. 166) The primary concern of this group was to restore the losses of the 1874 war, and return the lost territories to their previous allegiance under the king. However, such attempts were never effective in gathering consensus throughout Asante. Thus, in terms of a unified and coherent state with a state cosmology and set of rituals, the nineteenth century effectively came to a close by the end of the 1880s.

By 1882, rich gold districts such as Manso-Nkwanta responded to the king's excessive taxation by outright rebellion. The chief served notice to Mensa Bonsu that he no longer intended to give allegiance to Kumase. He gathered a following of over 6,000 men who notified the British Government of their intention to be admitted into the Protectorate.

(Aidoo: 1972, p. 168) One year later, Bekwai, a founding state and leading member in the Asante Union, also rebelled by rejecting the leadership of Mensa Bonsu and sending notice to the British of its desires to join the Protectorate. This abdication sent fear into the King. He reacted by hatching a plot to destroy Kumase and execute all chiefs in the region. Kumase chiefs were alerted to the scheme, however; and they rushed to the palace, gathered the sacred stools, and eventually forced Mensa Bonsu to abdicate the throne.

These events drove Kumase into confusion and turmoil by 1883. Struggles for power and the kingship lasted until March, 1888. Weary of civil war, the chiefs of Kumase elected Prempeh as King. However, the royal treasury was so depleted that Prempeh had to go cap in hand to the British in order to secure enough money for a wardrobe and for palace furnishings. One Asante author notes that "the situation was so hopeless at times that it suggests a general condition of political anomie throughout the kingdom." (Aidoo: 1972, p. 177)

In terms of historic process, the events which transpired in Asante society during this period are not unusual for African states. The explorer Dupuis commented on the vulnerability of the kingdom as early as 1820. Reviewing the office of head of state, he said, " powerful as the monarchy of Asante certainly is ... it may be considered a fabric whose foundation is subject to periodical decay, and therefore requires unremitting attention." (Dupuis: 1824, pp. 236-237) Wilks notes that the political climate of the mid-nineteenth century helped to foster a "militant movement" in 1879 which attempted to replicate mythical figures of the past. The movement received support from the rising entrepreneurial class who wished to advance European commodities, labor and money in

Asante. (Wilks: 1993, p. 173) Members of the movement created their own courts, identified and condemned witches, and even attempted assassination of Mensa Bonsu in 1880. The movement is examined below as the first recorded witch finding movement in Asante.

In terms of Asante society and its ideological foundations, the events of this period were disastrous. Asante were profoundly in tune with the notion that their culture was both literally and symbolically carved out of nature. As mentioned above, the political and religious processes of Asante society provided protection from the disastrous and threatening forces of nature. This understanding and reliance on ritual action was the basis of social and individual "dramas" which were played out in the contexts of religion, medicine and healing, and power. The notion has been expressed in terms of an ideal setting in which the kingship would perpetuate itself forever.

> No Asante King of the past could have won the hearts of the people if he ignored traditions, rejected the advice of the elders, broke taboos, or committed sacrilege. Such acts of abuse were regarded as a travesty of truth in the ideal Asant King; they were harsh anomalies and had not traditional and customary interpretation in ancient Asante traditions and culture...Care was taken not to commit the nation to any unnecessary breach that might provoke the feelings of the ancestral gods whose anger was inhuman and costly to appease. And so the ancient Asante Kings had divine power and dignity that had to be preserved and magnified from generation to generation. (Anti: 1974, p. 75)

The remaining chapters of this thesis will attempt to show how Asante struggled with the prevailing sense of disorder and confusion. While this struggle took many forms, my focus will be on its embodiment within the person, and how attempts at healing within witch finding movements may be seen as ways of defining and treating social and personal afflictions. Brief remarks about the individual and about women in the nineteenth century will serve to place these movements in better context.

## 2.5 The Place of Women in Asante Society

From its inception as a federation, and throughout nearly two centuries as a kingdom, the Asante state was materially and symbolically founded upon a central ideology. From the days of Osei Tutu throughout the nineteenth century, Asante were profoundly conscious that their culture was carved, in a very real sense, out of nature. Social and religious events and processes within the kingdom at large and at the high level of royalty bear out this historic fact. Moreover, this awareness created and sustained a perpetual anxiety and apprehension over the collapse of the state, along with its social and moral institutions. Such a collapse, it was perceived, would take place through the onslaught of nature and its abolishment of culture. Thus, without relentless effort, "the fragile defensible space called culture would simply be overwhelmed or reclaimed by an irruptive and anarchic nature. Thus the determination of culture, its preservation and enlargement, was construed as being about the domestication of the object -- the wresting of control from nature." (McCaskie: 1983, p. 28)

Such a division in Asante between what is considered cultural, relations and activity within society, and the unknown realm of nature is common to West Africa and to many other areas in Africa. As mentioned in chapter one, this division has had great impact on African history and on encounters with Europeans. Moreover, if there is any category of living entity capable of existing in both of these two worlds it is a witch. Indeed, the innate qualities of the witch stand opposed to all acceptable human values and morals. As a result, they are capable of and do transgress the material, social and cosmological boundaries of life and society. Such a multidimensional boundary in West Africa is the division between

nature and culture.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the Asante state, and its ideological base, were beginning to collapse. For reasons noted above, the state was in an irreversible condition of disrepair. It was believed that with this ruin, the chaotic forces of nature would overrun the domain of culture. In the imagery of W.B. Yeats, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere The ceremony of innocence is drowned."

A provocative essay on European and African witchcraft notes similarities in the descriptions of those beings who are thought to be witches. These include an insatiable appetite for material and sexual means, and a willing compliance to disrupt, even destroy or mock, the intimate relations between family and kin. Ralph Austin suggests that because witchcraft is almost exclusively suspected between close kinsmen that relations of reproduction, on both agricultural and sexual levels, become the fields for manifestation of witchcraft. Both of these areas, says Austin, are dominated by women. Austin suggests:

> a central trope of witchcraft beliefs is the misappropriation of scarce reproductive resources from households or communities for selfish use of accumulating individuals...At a more abstract level, it also seems possible to identify, in both European and African representations of the sexuality of witches, a common concern with the escape of female reproductive power from the enclosed domestic space in which it serves male-dominated communal norms to the open nocturnal realms of self-contained female power. (Austin: 1993, p. 100)

As may be suspected, a discussion of the historical and comparative contexts of witch activities suggests a focus on reproduction, gender politics and individual accumulation. For example, Beng witches may actually sell the names and identities of matrikin or of themselves. They are also known to sell their own body parts: arms, legs, or

in the case of women, breasts and menstrual cycle. Both forms of individual consumption obscure the ability to perform agricultural labor. The clandestine assumption of power through sacrificing one's identity in this manner is the epitome of immorality. (Gottlieb: 1989) In rural Africa today, and in nineteenth century Asante, the manipulation of human resources by witchcraft is often equated with control over the forces controlling the reproduction of everyday life. In the most unassuming conditions, these forces are revealed within the domestic arena of conjugal sexuality and food cultivation and consumption. Such conditions represent relations of power in Africa societies. The illegitimate use of this power is often the foundation of witchcraft confessions and accusations. Thus, studies by Goody (1970) and Gottlieb (1989) show a difference between female witches, who are absolutely disreputable, and males who are viewed as legitimate in their political and ritual performance of witchcraft.

As noted by Allman (1991), archival and historic sources regarding Asante women in the nineteenth are extremely limited. Yet these sources increase after British rule. It is difficult to portray with any accuracy ideologies of power and consumption as found within the matrilineage, or the relations of power between men and women. However, an interesting glimpse in the 1820s of the description of gender relations in royalty is given by Joseph Dupuis.

In 1820 the explorer Joseph Dupuis visited the Asante capital of Kumase at the height of the Asante kingdom and its power. The Asantehene had recently confronted a coup which was organized by a small group of royal women. Those who plotted against the king made their strike for power at a time when Asante was at war with the northern

vassal kingdom of Gyaman (1818-19). Leading the coup was the Asantehemaa, the queen mother. The anger of the king had been deliberately kindled by the Gyaman leader Kwadwo Adinkra, who attempted to provoke the king into battle by replicating for himself the sika dwa kofi of the Asante kingdom. This deceitful ploy was itself an attempt to align his interests with the royal women of Kumase in an attempt to kill the king and seize his throne. Detail provided by Dupuis give a remarkable description of Asante society near the beginning of the nineteenth century.

> When the king was about to open the campaign against Gaman, he collected together his priests, to invoke the royal Fetische, and perform the necessary orgies to insure success. These ministers of superstition sacrificed thirty-two male and eighteen female victims, as an expiatory offering to the gods, but the answers from the priests being deemed by the council as still devoid of inspiration, the king was induced to *make a custom* at the sepulchers of his ancestors, where many hundreds bled. This, it is affirmed, propitiated the wrath of the adverse gods. The priests then prepared a certain Fetische compound, which they delivered to the king, with an injunction to burn the composition daily in a consecrated fire pot within the palace; and upon no account to neglect the fire, so as to suffer it to go out; for as long as the sacred flame devoured the powder, he would triumph over his foes. When the king joined his army he commissioned his eldest sister (then governess of the kingdom), to attend strictly to the sacred mystery, telling her that his crown and life both depend upon her vigilance, and the fulfilment of his order. He selected also three wives to whom he was more attached than the rest, to watch by turns over the mysterious rites, in conjunction with his last mentioned sister. During the king's absence, this arbitress of his fate formed a connection with a chief of Bouromy, whose ambition suggested a plan to seat himself upon the throne.
>
> In this conspiracy, seventeen of the king's wives and their families are said to have joined; the fire pot was broken to pieces, and the chief commenced arming his party. But the king, added my informer, who had sustained heavy losses in the early part of the war, *and was unable to account for the audacity of the enemy*, performed an incantation over a certain talisman, which gave an insight into what was transacting in the capital. He therefore dispatched a body of men under Ousu Cudjo, who, after an impotent struggle on the part of the enemy, effectually crushed the rebellion. When the king returned home, he called a council to deliberate upon the punishment due to the offenders, and it was finally decreed that his wives should suffer death by decapitation. His sister, to prevent the profanation of spilling royal blood, was ordered to be strangled. The chief, her paramour, and all those of his party, were

> doomed to the most cruel deaths at the grave of the king's mother. These sentences were carried into prompt execution, and it is affirmed that above seven hundred people were sacrificed, or fell in resisting the royal forces. After this the younger sister, my present visitor, was made governess.
> While these butcheries were transacting, the king prepared to enter the palace, and in the act of crossing the threshold of the outer gate, was met by several of his wives, whose anxiety to embrace their sovereign lord impelled them thus to overstep the boundary of female decorum in Ashantee; for it happened that the king was accompanied by a number of his captains, who accordingly were compelled to cover their faces with both hands, and fly from the spot. This is said to have angered the monarch, although his resentment proceeded no farther than words, and he returned the embraces of his wives. But being afterwards told by some of the superintendents that these women were more or less indisposed from a natural female cause, he was inflamed to the highest pitch of indignation, and in a paroxysm of anger caused these unhappy beings to be cut in pieces before his face; giving orders at the time to cast the fragments into the forest, to be devoured by birds and beasts of prey. Nor did the atonement rest here, for six more unhappy females were impeached of inconstancy, (a failing, I believe, very common among them), and they also expiated their faults with their lives. Like another Ulysses, his majesty then devoted himself to the purification of his palace, when to sum up the full horror of these bloody deeds, two thousand wretched victims, selected from the Gaman prisoners of war, were slaughtered over the royal death stool, in honor of the shades of departed kings and heroes. (Dupuis: 1824, p. 114-117)

This is a dramatic description of gender politics and of mystical power. There is the aborted rebellion of Asantehemaa Adoma Akosua against Osei Tutu Kwame, her subsequent removal from office, and her replacement to the throne by Yaa Dufi. The rebellion, however, reveals several levels of confrontation.

First, a remarkably small number of conspirators attempted the mystical removal and murder of the Asantehene. Behavior of these women (and one Bron chief) identifies their intentions as witchcraft. The Asantehemaa and the Asantehene were both members of the royal Oyoko Koko abusua of Kumase. As matrilateral cousins of the same matrilineage, they were regarded as particularly susceptible to the practices of witchcraft. But even more significantly the coup was almost exclusively in the hands of women. Their

numbers were not great in terms of sheer political power; however, they were "members of the gender traditionally associated in Asante thought with witchcraft practices." (McCaskie: 1980, p. 128) Therefore, their decorum throughout the ordeal provides evidence of the abilities in this regard.

In "standard Asante witchcraft procedure" (McCaskie: 1980, p. 128) the plotters sought to bring death on Osei Tutu Kwame by pretending that he was already deceased. A wooden effigy was manufactured and placed in a coffin. These were then paraded through the streets of Kumase by women who chanted laments over the death of the king. Death was announced as having occurred in battle. A death ritual was then performed.

While sources on Asante women prior to British rule are incomplete, this scenario provides a formidable view of several themes which help to provide historic context for witchcraft and anti witchcraft movements. This chapter has elaborated some of these themes. First, the Asante state developed according to military power and predatory expansion. Its physical and moral stability were centered on the notion that the state was formed out of nature. Asante culture thus conceptualized a strict division between culture and nature. Second, this division was elaborated even further in religion and cosmology. A variety of lesser deities were considered responsible for the effects of nature in human life. Among these effects is personal illness and death. Such effects are ubiquitous, yet may be restrained to a degree. Such control involved the perpetuity of the state. Third, the Asante state began to collapse in the mid to late nineteenth century. This decline was due to the various effects of wealth and accumulation of material resources, particularly gold. The decline of the state was historically synonymous with the advent of European economies and

with the rise of the first anti witchcraft movements. Global economies had serious effects both on Asante society and upon the movements themselves. The movements therefore have political and historic dimensions which pre-date the British, but which were stimulated by British institutions of church and state. Fourth, a majority of those who confess to or who are accused of witchcraft are women. Fifth, in the nineteenth century illness was often given purely bio-medical treatment; however, illness also included suspicions of mystical impropriety.

The present chapter provides an ethnographic and historic review of certain areas of Asante society. The development of the state was presented. Economic and political transitions of the nineteenth century reveal a rapid decline of kingly power. This was followed by a broad dissatisfaction of state authority and behavior from a broad spectrum of the Asante confederation. This transition arose within the reign of Kwaka Dua Panin and reached its apex during the 1880s. During the nineteenth century, medical and religious practices also began to change. Those who controlled access to powers of medicine and mystical agents spread beyond the limited range of the political elite few. As will be seen, these forms of Asante power became accessed and controlled in new ways in the late nineteenth century. Commoners, non-elites, and a rising entrepreneurial class displayed a creativity of power in their capacities to ritually control witchcraft. This new use of power began before the British annexation of Kumase. However, the historical record demonstrates a dramatic rise in witch finding soon after European control of Asante life and territory.

The next chapter will review the impact of British expansionism in the Gold Coast Colony. Attention will be given to both ideological and practical features of

colonialism. Chapter 3 provides supportive information on the Wesleyan Methodist Mission and its missionaries as they arose in England and then expanded into the Gold Coast. The impact of the Mission on colonial administration is reviewed. It was through pressure from the Methodists and other missions that regulations were enacted to suppress the existence of healing shrines of witch finding cults. The cults flourished largely within a culture of colonialism. This detail, therefore, offers an historic context for understanding the growth of witch finding during the period of 1879 through 1945.

## Chapter III

## The Colonial Moment in the Gold Coast

This chapter reviews the historical developments in the Gold Coast during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and first two decades of the twentieth century. It also attempts to provide historic and other data which will provide background for the expansion of witch finding movements during the decade of 1870. These movements then proliferated into the twentieth century. Chapter three will extend ideas presented in chapter two. It will provide a context for evolving social and economic forms which arose for the first time in Asante society between 1896 and 1930. These new dimensions to Asante life serve to create a context of modernity within Asante society. They addressed changes in traditional Asante culture and society as we saw in chapter II. They also embrace the economic realities of a growing and dynamic global market which was being introduced in West Africa at an increasing rate.

This chapter will also present an introduction to colonial institutions of church and state. Most notably, these will include the British administration and its European methods of operation. Attention will also be given to the effects of capitalism on various portions of Asante society. European expansion also includes Christian missions. The most formidable of the time were the Roman Catholic and the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society. Foremost attention will be given to the Methodists for two reasons. First, of the two missions, the Methodists were organized on a much larger conceptual and geographic scale in the Gold Coast. Second, much greater material appears in the National Archives of Ghana regarding the Methodists. Thus, while other missions also occupied the Gold Coast

during this period, such as the Basel Mission, the Methodists had a more substantial influence within the colonial administration. This influence will be noted in great detail in chapter V. This chapter begins with an introduction to the ideology of colonialism in West Africa which created conflict and relations of hegemony and power. These relations were to become abundantly manifest within the performances of the witching finding cults themselves.

**3.1 British Beginnings: Disciples of Difference, Emissaries of Empire**

Christianity received its first routinized exposure within the boundaries of Asante in 1839 by the Wesleyan Methodists. The intent of the mission was to proselytize and convert. Its dialogue was thoroughly evangelical; yet this dialogue also warmly embraced the colonial government in many dealings with Asante. Missionaries were given immediate access to key political figures within Asante; however, Methodism did not make strong missionary advances in Asante until after British annexation in 1896. The first Wesleyan missionary to Asante was Thomas Birch Freeman in 1839. He was succeeded by Thomas Picot in 1876, just two years after the sacking of Kumase by the British.

There were two reasons for early access to the Asantehene. First, Asante royalty believed them to be legitimate representatives of the colonial government and of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. Missionaries played roles as intermediaries as a result of this presumption. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, this role ceased and even reversed itself. Faced with increases in witch finding, a practice which the Methodists considered unconscionable and evil, it was the missionaries who made constant appeals to the government to legally terminate such mystical occurrences. Second, the Methodists were

considered as agents of trade, which was gaining rapid popularity among the Fanti and all along the coast. Trade became especially popular between the British and Dutch and the southern Akan, especially after the resolutions for commerce allowed in the Anglo-Asante treaty of 1831.

Asante were, however, under sanction from the king to avoid Christian churches and schools. Christian conversion and western education were both viewed as insidious threats to the authority of the asantehene. They both engaged the person in activities considered individualistic and opportunistic in an economic sense. As such, they were beyond the parameters of legitimized action. Both involved the separation of the individual from the historic strictures of state control as a result of individual pursuits of conscience, agency, and the alienation of loyalty and reverence to the king and his predecessors. In other words, both Christian conversion and western education represented a denial and repudiation of Asante and of its historic epistemology.

Thus, until British forces sacked Kumase in 1874, Methodists had extremely limited effects upon Asante. Kumase commerce recovered from this defeat. However, internal dissent noted in chapter II, and the effects of trade and market, made the influences of Methodists and other Christian sects part of an increasing foreign presence within the borders of Asante. At times the interchange was peaceful and amusing, as evidenced in the following story related by the missionary Thomas Picot to the more senior W.B. Boyce in 1876.

> I had not been long seated before the Mohammedan priest came and seated himself near me. He said he had been two years in traveling from Hausa country...I asked him what he thought of Christianity. I then endeavored to give him my reasons for

> believing that Christianity was the true religion, and that Mohammed was a false prophet. At last, amidst roars of laughter from his own people who had been most attentive the whole time, and evidently deeply interested, he walked away, saying that he never before knew that God had a son. (WMMS: box no. 264/265, #1268)

Picot then preached to 40 other Hausa for more than one and a half hours. "I do not think the truths they heard will soon be forgotten by some of them."

Other experiences were agonizing for the Methodists. These occasions often revealed their intent as disciples of both Christianity and of cultural differences. Such an occasion is witnessed in a letter by J.A. Solomon to Boyce in December, 1870.

> Believers have been strengthened in the faith. Others profess to have felt the pardoning love of God in their heart. Many back sliders are being restored from the power of Satan unto God, the great shepherd of their souls. And a great many heathens have embraced the truth of the Gospel, and have cast away their "idols" [fetishes] to the moles and to the bats. The influences of the Spirit have been also very powerfully felt in some parts of the Circuit, and the societies are growing in grace and increasing in numbers. (WMMS: box no. 264/265, #1268)

A similar analysis is made by the missionary Hagan to his ecclesiastical senior in May, 1876. Such a perception of religion and Asante involvement with non Christian supernatural agents was to be increasingly opposed by the Methodists in the early twentieth century.

> The religion of the inhabitants consists of various kinds of idolatry, such as the worshiping of thunder, or god of war, small pox, or god of disease, beauty, age etc. Many priests and priestesses are engaging in these crafts, deceiving their brethren by telling future events of evil, and urging them now and again to do sacrifices to turn away the wrath of these gods foreseen by them. One cannot imagine the confused, numerous and continual dread in the hearts of the heathen. After they have done sacrifice to one or other of the gods, which often costs all they are worth, and sometimes involves them in debt, will still remain in fear of some other gods, whom from jealousy of being neglected, will afflict them with their own plagues. (WMMS: box no. 265, #1270)

Asante opposition to evangelical schools and churches was so great, that

Wesleyan Methodism was never really established in the region until after British annexation in 1896. To the Asante, the arrival of missionaries and teachers was the most evident result of British defeat of Kumase. (Mobley: 1970, p. 25) On July 25, 1916, one of the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries stationed in the Gold Coast wrote to the Reverend C.W. Armstrong at his residence in Cape Coast. G.H. Martin provides insight into the perspective he had concerning the spiritual sensibilities and moral apperception of Asante. "I recognize that more and more our position in the District must be maintained, not by superiority of office so much as by predominance of strong character, which never fails to tell. It is not easy in the midst of a negro community, keen intellect, shallow in nature, weak in morals, to bear the criticism, the suspicion, the challenge that have become the normal habit of some of our coast friends." (WMMS: box no. 769, #1399)

Martin's comments in 1916 were hardly atypical, either for the times or as a token of mission engagement in West Africa. Twelve months later, correspondence to Reverend Stephen J. Gibson offers a similar line of opinion regarding the numbers of Asante he had encountered in what was now well over a year of tenure in West Africa. "If you can destroy in them (Asante) some part of their vanity and create in them a love of the real, the simple, the true, the spiritual, the moral, you will have done a great work for the whole Church of the Gold Coast, and how great a Church it is." (WMMS: box no. 769, #1400)

The disposition to reproach and incriminate on moral grounds, as witnessed in Martin's solemn affirmation to Gibson, provides evidence of a dialogue of conquest and hegemony. "Destroy," no less! The very wording implies domination and radically imposed social reorganization from above. "Heathens had to be made to *acknowledge* their base

sinfulness, so that they might be given the means of recovering themselves." (Comaroff and Comaroff: 1997, p. 64) Within Gibson's intention one can find little room for sustaining what may be viewed as "good" within the native. Martin's comment is proof of the "discourse of power, and knowledge of otherness," as Mudimbe puts it. In Africa, the Methodists displayed a contempt for the mystical powers of natives ritual, and hoped to replace it with puritanical commitment to a more "rational" theory and to personal self-improvement. In the Gold Coast, missionary loathing of witch finding was surpassed only by human sacrifices.

What Martin experienced during his years of tenure in the Gold Coast appeared to him as an affront to those virtues of civility and deference which constituted his background as a Victorian Englishman and as Methodist. No longer in London, Martin pursued a wider agenda. This included the domestication of the native, an attempt to reform their minds through religious conversion. Yet Martin was clearly not a solitary figure. The colonial institutions in which he was an important player were marked by the incessant orientation to change, enlighten, develop and evolve. Their object was the natives themselves; and their model for change was middle class British society.

This model of social and moral change was not to be completed without costs. Methodist missionaries often wrote to their superiors of the euphoria of successes and the disparagement of failures. W.R. Griffin wrote in 1911 that "on Xmas day we baptized over 1,000 adults and on New Years Day we baptized nearly 1,000 infants...During the past 70 years, we have developed very strong churches on the coast. We have a wealthy people, a godly people, and a noble army of cultured young people...The psychological moment has

evidently arrived." The zeal of Griffin over entering numbers into the fold is unmistakable. Yet there was also discouragement. Later that year, W. Garfield Waterworth wrote of recent converts who did not see their membership within Methodism as a life long alliance.

> We had a pretty bad time here during the past month or so. My heart has been well nigh broken and my spirit crushed with the frequent backsliding of my people...I am doing a little pastoral work now amongst the English speaking natives. They greatly appreciate it. They are the folk we want to win for they have the brains as well as the heart--and the money too. Don't misunderstand me. I am not despising the illiterate; God forbid. Could I but speak the language, I should be always amongst them. (WMMS: Box. no. 768, 1911)

Power contains within itself its own forms of knowledge, its own aspects of culture, and its own methods of imaging. Colonial states in West Africa included their own particular histories. European capitalist penetration and missionary engagement embraced this history in specific ways. The "imagined community" which lived in the minds and purposes of colonial agents and agencies took on a life of its own when confronted with the reality of African existence. As John Comaroff has recently demonstrated, the notion of colonialism as a "coherent, monolithic process" seems to be fading. (Comaroff: 1989) In its place are the internal conflicts of the colonial body which tell a different story: contests of will and of judicial decision, dissent from administrative opinion, defiance of rule of law, contempt for ecclesiastical authority.

The Methodist societies of John Wesley began in a flurry of religious activity in England during the mid to end of the eighteenth century. Wesley, who was regarded in 1924 by a follower in Kumase as "one of the greatest Englishman of the 18th century," (WMMS: box no. 771, #1420) contended that the parish and parochial reading and interpretation of the Bible limited the scope of true Christianity. Indeed, this message was

never really meant to be contained within a singular church movement. Fundamental doctrines, prayers, sacraments, and authority itself of the Church of England were in question within the Wesleyan societies. He saw his reformation of Christian truths being taught more freely and honestly when they were administered by lay members. Wesley felt little loyalty to the Church of England, but had more a sense of respect for the Catholic Church. Yet neither religion addressed the real spiritual needs of the millions of religiously indifferent individuals throughout major portions of British society. This sector of the population was geographically found in the midlands, the northeast, and west Yorkshire where the Church of England had noticeably failed to keep in touch with communities most affected by the greatest movement of the times: the industrial revolution.

The Methodists met in barns, rooms in private homes and informal settings to hear the Word delivered from ploughmen, mechanics, chimney sweepers, pedlars and cobblers. Yet while their occupations may have varied, they all had in common the British middle class. This appeared to be the design of Methodist origins. Nineteenth century British society was inundated by Christian fervor. The social bodies of Parliament, the law, the military, the universities and schools were all dominated by the Anglican Church. Its symbolic head, or monarch, was the leader of both church and state. However, actual church participation was astonishingly low. The appeal of Christianity varied by region and income level. Anglicanism maintained strengths with aristocrats and upper classes. Roman Catholicism drew attendance from the very poor. The industrial middle classes of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries developed no great affiliation with either church.

Brown notes that the Religious Census of 1851 bears out these facts of church

attendance and devotion. By mid century, most of the middle classes were attending churches commonly referred to as nonconformist. Methodists were part of this movement.

> The Census also clearly delineated the geography of mid century dissent; weak in the more affluent areas, since wealthy and ambitious individuals had no wish to be restricted by the civil and legal disabilities still attached to nonconformity; weak also in the poorest areas, especially urban ones, because low income earners were hardly likely to find much appeal in a church system whereby, notionally at least, each congregation was responsible for the maintenance of the chapel and the minister. (Brown: 1988, p. 7)

The industrial revolution was in full swing by the beginning of the century. Its religious counterparts appeared to be the anti-clerical, anti-dogma, and anti-ritualist churches within the nonconformist scene. Wesleyan Methodists, and its successor sects, dominated the horizon. Beidelman has stressed that "the missionary movement in Britain cannot be separated from the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the lower middle classes." (Beidelman: 1982, p. 50) Biographies of those entering the sects as clergy chronicle the modest advances in class made by individuals and of the class itself. Thus the effects of class consciousness and radical social reconstruction were felt not only within the factories. They were also manifest in the Nonconformist churches. The liberalism which created a political middle class would sustain the religious and spiritual foundations of such orders as Methodism and other Nonconformist sects. (Halevy: 1971, p. 40)

How Methodism should expand and where it should extend its borders were questions which troubled leadership in the years 1800-1820. Hempton claims that formation of provincial Methodist missionary societies was the result of expansive optimism due to the defeat of Napolean and the victories of Wellington. These military matters overseas created a sense of millennialism and imperialism among English evangelicals. London Missionary

Society and Church Missionary Society both launched expansive foreign missions as a result of this ideological climate in England. Almost as a point of rivalry between denominations, the Methodist Missionary Society seized its own change to obtain congregational holdings on foreign ground. For many reasons, one of its prime targets was Africa. The year was 1813. (Hempton: 1984, p. 97)

Their purposes were evangelical. Their methods were to proselytize. Their credos included rational self improvement and personal reliance. These were at the very heart of the industrial revolution and of an evolving sense of capitalism, work and progress. Indeed, their personal and moral victories of the spirit would evidence the nascent truths of a rising capitalist -- and nationalist -- order. Thus, the degree to which they attempted to lead and teach by personal example (already an expression of bourgeois culture), Methodist missionaries identified a path which would gather the heathen out of darkness and obfuscation and escort them into the light.

Reports of 1918 show that the Methodist Church in the Gold Coast was staffed by 12 missionaries and 42 African pastors. Catechists and Teachers number 665, while Congregations totaled 261 and Communicants were numbered at 30,214. There were 240 schools with 14,792 pupils. The total mission community numbered 78,252. (Parsons: 1963, p. 6) One missionary wrote to Governor Guggisberg in January, 1923, "Our desire is to raise up a truly Christian nation." (WMMS: 1923, box no. 771, #1427) Another wrote of the social and moral conditions under which he labored. His remarks also give reference to the self proclaimed prophet healer William Wade Harris, whose ministry began in the Ivory Coast but which continued into the Gold Coast early in this century. The inscription here

refers to the thousands of Christian disciples who proclaimed Harris as a prophet.

> We know full well how we are borne up in prayer and work on your side of the water and we have set before us the aim of a yet greater harvest in this most barren field than ever Prophet Harris saw. The tragedy of that mass movement, or rather its effects, are apparent everywhere. I am not praying for another mass movement except it be a movement of the masses from the low levels of their faith to the higher ground of Christian achievement. (WMMS: 1924, box no. 771, #1430)

For the Methodists, separation of church and state made little sense in an era of British colonial diplomacy. Blunt statements by Methodists often showed how failure to measure up to these ideals became a means for public scrutiny. The wife of a missionary wrote the following in June, 1923. "The government officers speak in exactly the same way of how the people are entirely lacking in the team spirit [work ethic and nationalism] — even in small things — and how their sole aims are selfish, individualistic, money grabbing." (WMMS: 1923, box no. 771, #1427)

Turner notes how the emphasis on overseas evangelism created a new form of church men. Human beings came to be regarded in two categories: the converted, or "vital" Christians; and the unconverted, themselves either infidels or "formal" Christians. (Turner: 1985, p. 96) The extent of their success in Africa, says Mudimbe, also created a multi vocality of fictions about the "Dark Continent," and about the new ways Europe was attempting to invent it.

> An evolutionary thesis expresses the conversion from savagery and Satan's darkness to the light of civilization and God's kingdom. The transformation is sometimes described as the introduction or restoration of health in a sick universe, the establishment of order in a world of disorder, madness, corruption, and diabolical illusions. (Mudimbe: 1988, p. 52-53)

The missionary course was well anticipated if not well received. Their path

to enlightenment would retrace their own existence within nineteenth century middle class Britain. This included a synthesis of three vital images of the times. The first was the ability of the individual through scientific knowledge and capitalist desire to better one's position in life. The second included the imagery of the farmstead or the factory in which capable, hard working individuals equipped with suitable tools and instruments could produce abundant resources for the market. The third was the sovereign and newly reformed Empire of God, whose temporal concerns were confidently administered under the watchful care of divine authority.

The latter point is illustrated in a letter from H.G. Martin to his senior in 1916. His observations illustrate Euro-centricism and its nineteenth century perceptions of Africa. Martin refers to African adaptations of Christian doctrine and ideology as "abuses."

> The natives of the ... are impressionable and ignorant, and at this time sunk in gross materialism, and without properly qualified Christian leaders to guide and look after them, naturally in some cases their religious enthusiasm led to abuses; they were as sheep without a shepherd. (WMMS: box no. 769, #1399)

Creating an image of shepherd, Martin perceives his position in Africa clearly from a condescending vantage point. His observations of Africa and Africans demonstrates a nineteenth century code of ethics. His work to convert involves more than the transition from one religious orientation to another. Rather, the native must be more and better prepared in terms of moral conviction.

> I recognize that more and more our position in the District must be maintained, not by superiority of office so much as by predominance of strong character, which never fails to tell. It is not easy in the midst of a negro community, keen intellect, shallow in nature, weak in morals, to bear the criticism, the suspicion, the challenge that have become the normal habit of some of our coast friends. (WMMS: box no. 769, #1399)

The imagined geographical and cultural terrain of West Africa was elaborated in the British (and European) forms of modern self-consciousness regarding notions of pagan, heathen, savage, and crude. (Mudimbe: 1988; Said; 1978) Its dimensions were derived from vigorous debates by scientists, theologians, and philosophers concerning a modern conception of humanity, reason, civilization, and culture. These were topics forced upon the European mind in part by the rise of capitalism which situated Europe at the center of a global map in contrast to a remote economic peripheries. This debate also overlapped with the rising fanaticism over evolution, and its attempts to create categorical types of humans to explain the differences in appearance and behavior for the peoples of the world. Thus, in the European (and particularly British) concepts of cultural and physical variation in populations, difference implied gradation of an evolutionary and civilizing sort. These nineteenth century European realities of machine, enterprise, health, and enlightenment were carried abroad by administrators, jurists, doctors, and missionaries. Encounters in Africa were only to further enforce their moral and scientific convictions.

The rise of formal studies of anatomy and physiology provided additional grounds of difference between European and African. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the notion of civilization bequeathed a sufficient justification for difference — moral and political — between European and African. (Stocking: 1987, p. 18) But the rhetoric of science and the naturalists soon strengthened European perceptions. First, it was the philosophical rendering of the nineteenth century that notions of the reconstructed self could embody certain features of bourgeois ideology. These included discipline, ownership, loyalty, commitment, respect, and so forth. Such features were

apparently abundant in individuals who demonstrated self-discipline, hard work, sacrifice, and mastery of the self. In such a design, Victorian Englishmen placed themselves at one end of the evolutionary ladder. Africans were poised at the other end. Vehicles for advancement included the market and the Church. Spoken in the words of Reverend Robert Nassau, the process was evolutionary in its conception.

> In emerging from his heathenism and abandoning his fetishism for the acceptance of Christianity, no part of the process is more difficult for the African Negro than the entire laying aside of superstitious practices, even after his assertion that they do not express his religious belief. From being a thief, he can grow up an honest man; from being a liar, he can become truthful; from being indolent, he can become diligent; from being a polygamist, he can become a monogamist; from a status of ignorance and brutality, he can develop into educated courtesy. (Nassau: 1904, p. 101)

Conversely, the wandering European curiosity regarding the inhabitants of the dark continent, with their black bodies and unenlightened intellects, supported the growing scientific fever which linked certain human types with other less than human species. In this regard, science differed little from travel literature which placed Africans near the bottom of the racial ladder, just slightly below Asians and North American Indians and above Australians. Communication from the Chief Commissioner's Office to the Acting colonial Secretary of the Gold Coast in 1908 expressed the idea in the following letter. Again, such a letter could have been written by an explorer, a colonial officer, or a nineteenth century naturalist.

> Naturally a suspicious race, they (Asante) in the most cases view with misgiving any attempt on the part of the white man to draw from them an account of their native customs, belief, etc. immediately jumping to the conclusion that he has some ulterior motive for so doing. Under cross examination the Ashanti rapidly loses interest; his thoughts wander, and he answers at random. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/950)

The same natural science which was concerned with human types also created

a comparative study of anatomy. International explorations produced evidence of variations in both race and gender and in sexuality. It was inevitable that biology should be the basis of a division of labor already constructed in the economy and society. A rapidly expanding free market economy had notions of equity and equality as its ideological reason for being. But at its pragmatic foundations were found the wholesale exploitation of large portions of the population. These were usually based on race and gender. As the horizons of the European economy began to expand on remote regions in Asia and Africa, these same distinctions were portable by those who traveled and lived in newly formed colonies. Europeans were viewed as located at the center of the global center of reason, technology, society, and humanity. Non-Europeans were always at its margins in a similar manner to the way women were viewed at home. Both were immediately essential to the vitality of those at the center; yet both were limited in ability to be recognized as fully functional and participating partners. In this way, a nineteenth century economy was fused with the study of anatomy.

In other words, European depictions of Africa as "woman" was an extension of gender ideologies in Europe. The tropes of the times included attitudes of patronizing nationalism and watchful care over the "heathen races." The goal was civilization (capitalism) and conversion. This concept is expressed in a letter from one missionary, Palmer, to another, Perkins.

> I would really like to have a fair chance, in a good atmosphere, of demonstrating what can be made of African boys, and here, I think, is the place. Given fair play and good scope, I am content to give my whole life to this work...The people are more simply Methodist. There is no aping of Anglicanism. (WMMS: 1902, box no. 767)

A similar sentiment is expressed in a 1909 letter from Bartrop to Brown. "The people (Asante) must be looked after or they may drift away or do things which will bring discredit upon the Church." (WMMS: 1909, box no. 767) Again, the same period provides a familiar description of the African, the "other."

> Every day brings fresh revelations of the urgency of the need for men. We are really up against it in this mission at present. The men employed in my absence are not only useless, but they have done much to spoil the opportunity given us through the Awakening. I am weeding them out as quickly as possible, but it will take us some time to recover from the injury dealt us. Apart from the numbers who have committed adultery, the majority have proven themselves incompetent and lazy. (WMMS: 1921-22, box no. 770)

The author of this letter uses both the Protestant work ethic and a Christian set of moral conduct as a basis for his description of Asante behavior. These Euro-centric values were applied by missionaries to a wide range of conduct. Missionaries opposed on moral grounds practices ranging from religion to kinship and the family. In 1912, for example, Wesleyans began a campaign of remarriage for all of their converts who had been married according to native custom. Since African marriages were not recognized by the laws of the Church, they reasoned, customary nuptials were disregarded as illegitimate. Such couples, by consequence, were not really married at all.

Non Europeans were often considered primitive in every regard, including their bodies and bodily appearance, diseases, etc. (Fabian: 1983, p. 17-18) It was widely viewed by the missionary that conversion to Christianity would change that disposition. Moreover, conversion would also bring to the native a greater sense of reason and a deeper ethical awareness. (Hefner: 1993, p. 4) Such developments of the person, the family, and society appeared self-evident to the missionary.

From the native's point of view, social discontinuity was also expressed through bodily metaphors. In some cases, the body became a kind of commodity under expanding capitalism. (Weiss: 1995; Bastian: 1993) However, these metaphors were often contradictory and inconsistent. They used images of malfunction and incapacity to express both physical and social conditions. Healing ritual and practices of bodily restoration were used as a means of addressing these perceived disruptions. Healing serves as a source for resolving social discontinuity through medical attention toward the maligned human corpus.

Colonial hegemony and penetration into West Africa contained its own imagery of otherness. As mentioned, the images of the African included primitive, naked, cannibal, pagan, ill, and disorder. All of these contrasted strongly with white civility of Victorian Englishmen and Germans. In all instances of engagement, whether in the market or in the church, the African lived within the conditions of dominant discourse, within a hegemony which created otherness, and which attempted to control and transform from their perceived conditions of natural savagery to civilization and to Christianity. "An evolutionary thesis expresses the conversion from savagery and Satan's darkness to the light of civilization and God's kingdom. The transformation is sometimes described as the introduction or restoration of health in a sick universe, the establishment of order in a world of disorder, madness, corruption, and diabolical illusions." (Mudimbe: 1988, p. 52)

The manner in which the native is perceived, the degree of his illness and disorder and savagery, and the manner in which the colonizer manifests his power are always historically specific issues. The considerable tolerance of Church Missionary Society elders toward indigenous religion in Kenya (Strayer: 1978) was, for example, much less severe than

the forced slaving of the Xhosa, Sotho, and other Khoisan peoples by the Dutch East Indies Company during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (Ross: 1983) Typically,

> however, the making of hegemony involves the assertion of control over various modes of symbolic production: over such things as educational and ritual processes, patterns of socialization, political and legal procedures, canons of style and self-representation, public communication, health and bodily discipline, and so on. (Comaroff and Comaroff: 1993, p. 25)

The Tshidi example demonstrates the political economy of healing as a reaction to both capitalist relegation to the margins of the South African economy and to British missions which placed Tshidi Christian converts at the periphery of God's kingdom. But Tshidi Zionist churches emerged not in mere recognition of these social limits of differentiation, but also to "open up a general discourse about estrangement and reclamation, domination and resistance." (Comaroff: 1985, p. 11)

We have already seen how the hierarchy established between Methodist missionaries and the Asante themselves, between God's emissaries and those yet to be enlightened, reproduced the strict divisions established by the market and by political divisions in England. We have noted how conditions of labor and premises of science created social differentiation in the Gold Coast. The darkened savages, viewed as sinners in a "good" world, must first be given the talents required for industrious competition and self construction in order to learn that service in this life brings its rewards in the next. They must, in other words, find themselves as servants in a capitalist scheme in order to achieve materials success in this life and spiritual rewards in the next life. Such was the implied position of the missionary as perceived by many Africans in the nineteenth century.

It may be stated that religious and medical movements of the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries were creative responses to conditions of stress and change. They reflect local relations, not global trends. To describe independent movements as merely products of external forces is to "render them vacuous, to deny them any active role in the dialectics of their own history." (Comaroff and Comaroff: 1982, p. 145) Independent prophetic and healing churches, and witch finding and witch cleansing rites are determined and determining of the effects of historical discontinuity and of rapid social change. This included the effects of colonialism. Asante witch finding resulted from both internal Asante history in the nineteenth century, and from influences imported from a European presence. This presence is more completely understood by relating two more examples from the early twentieth century.

In the early years of British rule in Asante, Methodist missionaries generated numerous appeals to the colonial government concerning customary practices. Petitions were based on the belief that certain local customs were both harmful and a discredit to the performers. One such request was to avoid the tendency to incur extreme financial family debt at funerals. It was placing some of their congregation in economic hardship. Drinking of alcohol at funerals was also an affront. "Apart from the deleterious effect on the health and morals of the people entailed by this excessive consumption of alcohol, these customs are also a serious drawback to the progress of the country generally...It is no uncommon thing to find that the debts attached to the stools of chiefs or heads of families are due directly to these customs." (NAG: A.D.M., 11/1/43)

Other formal pleas were made because practices were considered offensive and evil. These involved dancing and the ancient custom of human sacrifice in Asante. Both

behaviors had mystical implications. It was mentioned above that dancing was often part of the ritual performance of akɔmfoɔ divination and healing. There was very little efficacy without the performance of dance. Missionary appeals to the government included a strict ban on the performance of dances and songs known as atsai or kasakye. As stated by one missionary, "the dance is indecent and conducive to immorality while the songs are abominable and even slanderous and are likely to induce the youths of Manya Krobo to form bad habits and to become indolent and disobedient." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/922) Such dances were restricted under bye-law 13a of the Attorney General of the Colony. The missionary cited the law in his plea.

Public performances of song and dance were also a point of consternation for H.D. Appah, who believed that such displays were intentional methods of disrupting his Sunday services. In May, 1877 he correctly linked the songs with akɔmfoɔ. He also saw in them the work of the devil.

> These fetish people, with their wicked deeds, are causing much trouble in the town. Among other evil things they do is that every Thursday while we are holding the public worship of God, they parade the streets, singing shameful songs, and carrying with them these fetishes which they say belong to their master the devil. They do this to hinder, if possible, our preaching and praying; and by these wicked deeds they keep back many souls who are desiring to come into society and seek for salvation. Please have an eye into this subject and get the public authorities to help us by sending some policemen to stop these proceedings, that there may no longer be any hindrances, and that the blessed Gospel may have its course in the interior. (WMMS: 1877, box no. 265, #1274)

The nature and use of dance by Asante, especially as part of witch finding rituals, continued to be a source of lengthy debate and interpretation between missionaries, the colonial government, and local Asante political and mystical officials. This use and

display of the body allows insight into the discourse of difference which was forever present in the Gold Coast. The missionaries saw such body display as offensive their sense of modesty. As a form of ritual, dance was considered as primitive and evil as the very notion of mystical healing. To Asante, as noted, ritual dance was a necessary feature of witch finding ritual. Correspondence to the Governor in 1926 provides insight into these differences in perspective. J.E. Gresham Williams sent a substantial body of data to Accra as he investigated the death of a woman who was accused of witchcraft. His correspondence focused on several aspects of rather lengthy investigation. One letter noted the amounts of money collected by akɔmfoɔ from men, women, and all children at the commencement of a witch finding ritual which Williams witnessed. He then commented on the dance given by the ɔkɔmfɔ. "When the money was collected, the chief fetish man then held a large dance in which the girl was tortured and made the sport of by men and women." The letter then continues with the accusation that the girl was found to be a witch, and was murdered by the ɔkɔmfɔ. For Williams, the evidence proved irrefutable guilt of the priest. Allegations made regarding the girl were irrelevant to Williams. Instead, he moved to arrest the priest.

Another perspective on the dance was given by a local chief, omanhene, of the town in question. This refutation does not dispute the murder of the girl, nor the guilt or innocence of the ɔkɔmfoɔ. What is questioned is the general interpretation given by Williams of both the dance and the witch finding ceremony.

> As regards the dance at Osino on the day in question, I have only to remark that while the dance is very much unlike the dance with the silent music with which you are probably familiar, your opinion as to the intention of the people was ill conceived. That you should say that at the place and time the dance was practiced the people had "the full intention of killing" the woman is undoubtedly a gross

> exaggeration. The poverty of your knowledge and experience of the people of this part of the world is doubtless accountable for that. Nonetheless, if the practice had any objectionable features, the parties thereto have been penalized at the District Commissioner's Court, and I do not intend with this letter to question their guilt. But I must on behalf of my people protest against your repeated allegation as to their being barbarous and a gang of intended murderers. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/952)

The letter was written and signed by Akyem Abuakwa, chief of Osino village.

Another reference to a first hand chronicle of dance as performed within witch finding ritual provides a graphic description of what was offensive to the Victorian mind. Even though the correspondent observed no crime, he did witness a spectacle which was morally and religiously an affront to his sense of propriety. Dance and the body became cultural symbols of difference.

> Nearing the village (Akankasi) a great deal of noise could be heard and I learned the fetish dance was in progress. To allay suspicion of my approach the escorts were sent on ahead and I followed some few minutes later. Two women and a man were dancing but at sight of me the music and the dancing came to an abrupt stop. The man was wearing a pair of khaki shorts and a greenish cover cloth; the women were also wearing khaki shorts and blue prints. They were all sober and the man quite normal in every way. The women were nude to the waist, had white clay on their arms and body and appeared to be in an advanced stage of hysteria which took several minutes to wear off. Sitting amongst the spectators were found three other women with their arms and body white clayed one of whom was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. The dancing was going on around a conical shaped earthen mould fixed into a two tier platform made also of earth. This platform and conical mould represent the female fetish. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/952)

Human sacrifice was an abominable affront to the Europeans from the earliest years of missionary contact. Sacrifice was usually performed on criminals who were guilty of murder, incest, or who were thieves. McCaskie has written how human sacrifice was an ultimate statement of power and authority by the state in its ability to "affirm ideologies of right order." (McCaskie: 1995, p. 213-214) Thus, human sacrifice was common at state

functions and mystical processions such as the annual yam festival. It was considered as usual punishment for offenses against the state and the king. Such public offenses were often given the most public of venues for the execution of sentence. The yam festival was such an occasion, when the size of Kumase often tripled or rose even larger due to the many who migrated for the week long event. In such a forum, the display of state and kingly power was unmistakable.

The European take on the custom of human sacrifice, however, was entirely another matter. Early comments included a statement by the missionary G. Chapman regarding his observance of sacrifice at the annual odwira performance in 1844. The reference is to the offering of human victims to serve deceased asantehene who now live in asamandow, or "land of the ghosts."

> The yam custom, now nearly over, has been distinguished by its usual barbaric splendor, excess, and iniquity. Amidst much of a most distressing nature, one circumstance has not been without its happy effects on my own mind. Only one human victim, and he a criminal, has bled during the Custom. This affords a pleasing contrast to the bloody scenes of former years. Surely the time hastens when these sad transactions shall be forever no more. (WMMS: 1844-1845, box no. 260, #1150)

The frequency of sacrifice was also noted by H. Wharton. One evening in April, 1846, Wharton and a companion were walking the streets of Kumase. They came upon a distressing scene. Wharton sent his companion ahead to identify the nature of the brutality. The consort reported that two young women were being sacrificed to accompany the sudden death of royalty. A youthful princess had died that evening. As a result, human sacrifice was considered a necessary accompaniment. In the ideology of the state, the individual(s) thus rendered affirm perceptions of right (historical) order by witnessing

abandonment of personhood through power of the asantehene to control even embodied existence. However, Wharton provided his own evaluation.

> Human life is estimated at an exceedingly low value in Kumasi. There is scarcely a street through which I have yet walked, but I have observed bloody indications of a recent sacrifice; they are literally blood stained. (WMMS: 1844/1845, box no. 260, #1150)

Just two weeks later, Wharton continued the same theme in another letter. "Human sacrifices are of such frequent occurrence in Kumasi that the benighted inhabitants have become perfectly naturalized to them."

In this section, I have written about some aspects of class distinctions and ideology in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the mid nineteenth century, and how these features were carried by the missionaries into an African setting. I have argued that Wesleyan Methodist missionaries presented familiar themes in colonial religion and politics in the Gold Coast. These themes were evolutionary in content, and thus reflected the scientific tenure of the times. Themes of conversion included attempts to take the native from a state of savagery to one of civilization, from illness to health, from disorder to order, and from darkness to light. These features were essential to the missionary enterprise and to administrative regulations. In the reality of social confrontation, these themes translated into colonial difference and intolerance. Dances, sacrifices, shrine rites, rituals of healing, priests, and non-Christian deities, among others, signified these differences. In the next section I will show how some Asante embraced the economic potential of European economies.

### 3.2 Political and Economic Transitions: Akonkofoɔ and Odwira

Up to this point, I have presented historical evidence and argued that Asante society changed in unprecedented ways beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. The previous chapter argued how this change was due to political and economic turmoil within the Asante state. This chapter presents evidence on how society changed because of western influences of colonial control, economy, and missions. I now focus on the rise of a sub elite class during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

British annexation of Asante began in 1896. British forces arrested and exiled the King, and imprisoned many other political elites. During this period a new approach to money and commodities was embraced by particular influential Asante men. This new design on money had no precedent in Asante history. Indeed, commoners and non royalty had little or no participation in trading before colonialism. Trading privileges were strictly limited to the asantehene himself and to select amanhene, or heads of principle territorial and political divisions. Bowdich claims this limitation was due to asantehene suspicions that open and free trade would promote greater access and competition for power among commoners. Bowdich also stated that open trade for all Asante may present individuals with opportunities for sedition. Guns and bullets could be purchased and traded by Asante to political enemies of the state. (Bowdich: 1966, p. 319)

Trade required capital. Capital most often involved either rights over land and other resources, or over people. While trade was officially limited to the elite of the state, other osikani, or "rich men" were able to gather significant resources through exchange of kola for slaves, for cattle and for small craft products. Busia notes how land rights were held within lineages and passed on in perpetuity. The rights were usufruct. The land could

be homesteaded; but it could not be sold. Kola and other cash crops were farmed by individuals who accumulated wealth based on farming experience and their ability to trade at market. (Busia: 1951, p. 47) Taxation at the rate of twenty per cent represented attempts by the state to prevent massive accumulations of wealth (gold dust) through the trading of kola and other high commerce items such as slaves. In addition, rising business moguls could be forced to make loans to the political elite. This would greatly deplete their capital and thus any abilities to be influential in large scale trading.

We have seen in chapter II how the over zealous control of individual wealth by the asantehene Kwaka Dua Panin (1838-1867), and the state campaigns of terror during the reign of Kwaka Dua and Mensa Bonsu (1874-1883) led to large scale revolt and civil war. Mensa Bonsu himself, whose reign was "marked by a thrust toward modernization," (Wilks: 1975, p. 50) endorsed the adaptation of European technology at an unprecedented rate. These broad movements, both internal and external, have prompted writers such as McCaskie to conclude the that traditional Asante state came to an end during the turbulent decade of 1870. (McCaskie: 1983) In its place was a new era which was strongly influenced by European markets and religion. This was extremely observable after 1896.

Another effect of the increase in taxation was the rise of professional traders in Asante. This new elite found opportunities for wealth in the northern territories and in Fanti coastal communities of Elmina and Cape Coast, and in Accra. They made claims on the expanding interests in rubber and in gold, especially in coastal communities. These new elite traders became known as akonkofoɔ, or rich man combined with gentlemen, or omama. Akonkofoɔ were known in 1894 and afterwards as anibue, as "being civilized" persons from

the coast. Their power was strictly in wealth as a result of trading natural resources; and it was tenuous as they needed British patronage in order to be protected from civil sanctions within the borders of Asante.

In the coastal communities where they had the most contact, akonkofoɔ soon became identified as asikafo, trader or business men. (Arhin: 1986, p. 26) They were known as money lenders and as traders in capital and resources. The lives of akonkofoɔ were altered to match the conditions of more westernized coastal communities. For example, their dress was no longer that of Asante. They wore the clothing of the European, including white shirt, vest, a hat, shoes or sandals, sometimes a suit or coat, and a walking stick.

Clothing and body decoration in new styles may be considered as symptomatic of the sweeping social and economic changes being introduced into Asante during the declining decades of the nineteenth century. Akonkofoɔ were atypical of most Asante simply by the fact of their individual resources for capital. Perhaps most significant is the new form of government which allowed non royalty to gain access to trading and to wealth. However, their involvement in international economies provided for a new identity.

Individual wealth has been viewed traditionally in West Africa as an anomaly, particularly when the possessor is of no great political stature. Wealth is assured by use of medicines, and a man without wealth is poor because of witchcraft. (Lloyd: 1974, p. 52; Barber: 1991, p. 233) Wealth is also acquired and its constituent commodities protected through use of shrines. The illegitimate usages of such commodities are protected by curse. (Linares: 1992, p. 36)

In the Gold Coast, akonkofoɔ were seen by Europeans and Asante as anibue,

or civilized. At the heart of this concept was the adaptation of a British way of life. This new identity was symbolized in the clothing they wore. Thus, "clothing and other treatments of the body surface are primary symbols in the performances through which modernity — and therefore history — have been conceived, constructed and challenged in Africa...That both the "modern" and the "traditional" are powerfully and principally constituted in body treatments." (Hendrickson: 1996, p. 13)

This new form of adornment and body presentation has been noted recently by anthropologists as a marker of cultural difference and as an emblem of modernity. For example, Margaret Jean Hay has noted that in early twentieth century Luo communities clothing was an exclusive symbol of conversion to Christianity.

> Missionaries and African Christians worked actively to influence the adoption of new forms of clothing; indeed, the early Christian converts were known as jo-nanga, "people of cloth," and elaborate clothing for all participants came to be part of Christian wedding ceremonies. Clothing came to play a part in funerals as well, with a widow expected to throw much of her clothing on her husband's grave. (Hay: 1996, p. 252)

Other writers have noted the cultural marking which is elaborated with different forms of dress and body adornment. Thus, James notes how local ideologies of clothing and body symbolism invoke contrasting oppositions between sesotho, or traditional means of behavior, and sekgowa, white ways. During this century in South Africa, sesotho behaviors, including dress and clothing, have increasingly yielded to influences of sekgowa, particular in the areas of education and attendance of western schools. Movement towards modernity, however, has also invoked the use of tradition at several levels of society. Thus, the two notions are often framed in terms of "images of modernity, resulting in sets of

opposed dualities: town/country, townsman/peasant, Christian/non-Christian, setswana/segoa." (James: 1996, p. 34)

A careful reading of the Sotho material presented by James shows that such oppositions are not simply "a confrontation between primordial folk and the modern world." (Comaroff and Comaroff: 1987, p. 194-195) Rather, a decisive pattern emerges which demonstrates a Sotho identity formed in contrast to the ways of Europeans. This identity is historically precise. It represents prolonged contact with Europeans; but it is formulated in terms of traditional meaningful images and symbols. The complexity of these images is often understood only by reference to their history. Clothing worn by some Herero peoples in Namibia replicates the style and cut of Europeans; but the colors have traditional meaning to all Herero. Thus, in the display and wearing of colored cloth "there appears to have been a circulation of images and potent, multi-layered, historically accumulated referents in which value has also been created." (Hendrickson: 1996a, p. 215)

Akonkofoɔ and other Asante exiles living in coastal towns and in Accra before 1896 often voiced their support for a British defeat of the asantehene. This was in part due to their opinion that Asante government was too corrupt to ever be put straight again. But it was also due to their own economic investments. They looked for a day when the old empire could be recreated, only its (re)construction would be made not under Asante rule, whose power had destroyed the old order. Instead, the new order would be made according to British design. They considered the British to be the most capable force to rebuild the Asante state, which would be unified to include other Akan states such as the Fante along the coast.

Identified akonkofoɔ were recognizable for all their signs of modernity. Besides clothing, they lived in wood homes fashioned in two leveled colonial style. Their families road in carts with wheels. Their children attended European schools and received a British education. "Their 'modernity' (stretching back to the time of Mensa Bonsu) consisted in their formidably tenacious defense of the individual's right to accumulate and to dispose of capital." (McCaskie: 1986, p. 7) Akonkofoɔ recognized these emblems of modernity as aspects of a new economy; and they opposed any economic measures which would restrict investment of capital and trade at its fullest extent. They were therefore vocal in their opposition to a British proposed death tax which resembled the tax leveled by Kwaka Dua in an attempt to increase revenue for the Asante state. Letters written to the Governor of the Colony by various akonkofoɔ announced their resistance to the tax. These letters also showed the degree of modernity and assimilation already achieved by this new elite.

> I am a businessman, and a citizen of Ashanti but owing to certain laws laid down in former times whereby the king or chief was entitled to take hold of the properties of deceased which consequently brought about a war between the Ashantees [Kumase] the Kokofus and Juabens which resulted in the downfall of the nation and the people were obliged to flee to the coast. (Quoted in Arhin: 1986, p. 27)

The author of this letter to the British Governor then wrote of the desirable and profitable conditions of a modern economy which were introduced into Asante by the British. "Since the British Government came into existence in Ashantee, we have seen the welfare of the nation, everybody getting his daily bread, and besides fine buildings have been erected in Kumasi." (NAG: A.D.M. 113/1908)

These letters were joined by an epistle written by 39 other akonkofoɔ in protest against the proposed death tax. Their point of opposition was familiar: the tax

resembled moves by a corrupt Asante king which ultimately led to civil war. They also reconfirmed the British deliverance from such calamity by the sacking of Kumase and the annexation of the state. These events ushered in a new era of progress; and progress, in their minds, was the ability to trade freely and make capital work for them. These events, they claimed, transformed their identities. They were no longer Asante forest dwellers. Economy had transformed them into civilized Europeans. Indeed, their capitalistic enterprises introduced a new form of social differentiation into Asante society, an economic class. (Arhin: 1983b) This kind of status defied the hierarchy and rank (power) of the state. "We turned ourselves from warriors into Merchants, Traders, Christians and men of properties, keep monies in the banks under British protection and [have commenced] to build huge houses." (NAG: A.D.M. 113/1908) They then related the following to the Chief Commissioner of Asante:

> In your Honour's time Kumasi is almost part of London, whatever institution in London is in Kumasi. Kumasi has big mansions, banks, churches, lights defeated darkness, wills making and letters of administration have sunk capricious chiefs free-bootering [sic.] deceased's estate and we are tax payers to the British government to help make the electric lights, water works, schools, churches, roads and other comfortable things. The British government does not seize by force deceased's estates but protects them. (NAG: A.D.M. 113/1908)

All 39 persons signing the petition were known in Asante as traders to the state. Their residences prior to 1896 were found in coastal areas within British controlled areas. After 1896, they all returned to Kumase. Their uses of colonial institutions and government were entirely individualistic. Their goals included the personal accumulations of resources and wealth; and their aims included the manipulation by the Asante state for the appropriation of that wealth. Indeed, the most successful among them were leading figures

in the rubber boom of 1880 and 1890. These profits, in turn, fueled the revolution in farming and international trade in cocoa in the twentieth century. (Arhin: 1972)

As such, akonkofoɔ positioned themselves outside the state, and thus outside of history in a traditional sense. In other words, the Asante state in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was constructed on the ideology of expansion and power. At the center of the legitimization of power was the asantehene. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Asante state dispersed, allotted, and ultimately received wealth in what was a money (gold) scarce economy. Control over money was an inevitable result of the ultimate power the state had over Asante society. The state used internal coercion and hegemony by the force of power to control actions, behaviors and relations of all Asante. The "gentlemen" of the late nineteenth century, however, represented a new period in Asante history. They were individualists. They expanded within Asante society an enterprising of commodities, and a business-like method -- a "spirit of capitalism"-- with petty bourgeois qualities.

The expansion of capitalism and Christianity were noted by Mensa Bonsu himself in a lecture given to Thomas Picot in 1876. On April 21, 1876 Thomas Picot wrote to his ecclesiastical superior W.B. Boyce concerning an encounter he had with the Asante king Mensa Bonsu in the palace of the king. This was not the first one to one conversation which Picot had with the king. It was not uncommon for the king to have such meetings with the Methodist missionaries; and Picot had conversed directly and indirectly with the king on several occasions. According to correspondence, this meeting was called by the king. It was dominated by the king's agenda and his intended message to Picot, the Methodist mission, and the British presence in Asante. The words of asantehene Mensa

Bonsu were scribed by the recipient.

> I am pleased with the friendship you (Picot) have shown towards me, and I will receive you on the same condition as my grand uncle Kwaku Dooah (Kwaku Dua Panin) received the mission. Mr. Freeman acted as a peace maker between the Ashantis and the British; so that from his friendship and the wise administration of Governor Maclean my grand uncle enjoyed peace, and trade prospered in his time. We will accept the mission if you act as he (Mr. Freeman) did to help peace of the nation and the prosperity of trade. As we tell you, so Mr. Freeman, your predecessor, was told by my grand uncle and his chiefs. It was the only condition for the establishment of the Mission then. But you must understand that as my grand uncle did so will we do. We will not select children for education; for the Ashanti children have better work to do than to sit down all day idly to learn hoy! hoy! hoy! hoy! They have to fan (regard) their parents, and to do other work, which is much better. As a friend I give you my boy for education...but any other children you cannot have. It is a tradition that Ashantis are made to know they are subject, altogether under the power of their King, and they can never be allowed liberty of conscience.
> The Bible is not a book for us. God at the beginning gave the Bible to the white people, another book [Qur'an] to the Cromos [one who can read: Muslims] and the fetish [abosom] to us. Our fetishes are God's interpreters to us. If God requires a human sacrifice or a sheep, he tells our fetishes, and they tell us, and we give them. They tell us too where the gold is with which we trade. We know God already ourselves and we cannot do without human sacrifices. As to the [Ten] Commandments of god, we know that we keep them all. We keep the first through our fetish. In Ashanti we do not allow people to abuse the name of God. As to keeping the Sabbath, we have always kept it. If a man steals, we kill him, as the English killed a man in Kumasi for stealing. If a man takes the wife of another we kill him. If a man commits murder we kill him too. But we will never embrace your religion, for it would make our people proud. It is your religion that has ruined the Fanti country, weakened their power, and brought down the high man on the level with the low man. The God of the white man and of the Fantis is different from the God of the Ashantis. As we cannot do without our fetishes. (WMMS: 1876: box no. 265, #1269)

The chief of Bantama, Kwaben Awua, supported everything said by Mensa Bonsu. He then added his own words to those of the king.

> The Fantis can do without polygamy and without slaves, but we cannot. As men differ in complexion so in religion. Your God is not like our God...If you send in twenty missionaries, you will get one Ashanti man to be a Christian. It is trade we want, only trade we cry for.

These words were much briefer. At the conclusion of the remarks of Kwaben Awau, Adu Bofo then concluded with a point of defiance for the political authority of the British Empire and for the missionary which stood before them as representative.

> Why do we listen any longer! He will be telling all this to his brother missionaries in England; and if this white man has been sent to us by Queen Victoria to give us this message we could give a definite answer, and say at once that we will never have anything to do with the Christian religion and would stand the results. Where are our fathers? What has become of them? As they did shall we do, and where they are we shall go. (WMMS: 1876; box no. 265, #1269)

Picot then departed Kumase that same afternoon for the more receptive atmosphere of the coast.

Statements given by Mensa Bonsu and the others represent a common response to Methodist Christianity in nineteenth century. From the perspective of the state, missionary offerings presented certain unavoidable hazards to its existence. Christian doctrine featured the notions of grace and salvation through individual means, including social status by economic achievement. Moreover, the individual also had great potential for social advancement and attainment of riches through western (Methodist) education. From either perspective the state is threatened. Both presented the potential from radical social transformations. Even though the two decades from 1870 to 1890 represent a period of crisis, and of turbulent internal change, an ideology of state continued to live on--at least at the level of the asantehene. This ideology, in fact, continues until 1896 when Asante is annexed by the British and the asantehene is exiled to the Seychelles.

During that same year also, Asante experienced its last performance of odwira at the state level for nearly 100 years. European observers such as Bowdich wrote about

odwira from the perspective of a harvest or first fruits festival. The inauguration of odwira is associated with Osei Tutu and the inception of the Asante state. The harvest was the yam; and thousands of Asante came from towns and villages into Kumase for the annual enactment of odwira. The festival is much more than a rite of harvest, however. It represented the power and identity of the asantehene, the identity of society, the recognition of the deceased and of those yet to be born, and a cleansing of the king and the state from all impurity. In short, odwira is a performance and legitimation of the state in history.

The name odwira is derived from the Twi root "to cleanse." The community, the state, and the king, must be purified from pollution of the previous year. When this is done, all others may eat. Although odwira purified the state and community, its focus was on the king. The ritual status of the king was generally equivalent to that of the entire state, both living and dead. Both deceased and yet unborn Asante were all ritual participants in odwira. As such, the asantehene was viewed as an embodiment of history, past, present and future and as a revival of state powers. He was a living icon of the Asante sunsum. In this regard, the sunsum of the asantehene resembled that of all other Asante, since each person's sunsum was capable of mystical protection and abatement from hostility and illness, such as that suffered through bayi.

All of Asante history and community were ritually mediated by the person of the king. The body of the king therefore symbolized both history and community. As the king mediated between royal ancestors and living persons and was purified in odwira, so was the rest of Asante purified. Indeed, "Asante history 'emoted' itself" (McCaskie: 1995, p. 199) as the king ritually contemplated his position and power in regards to all Asante, living

and dead and to the state itself. By "mediating upon the condition of being Asante on behalf of everyone else by looking into his own selfhood," (McCaskie: 1995, p. 199) the asantehene was able to articulate the self in relation to society and to history. This is done by commanding a host of images, memories, symbols, traditions, and indisputable truths. Moreover, the topography and landscape of the kingdom are equally at risk, for if odwira "is not performed, it is believed disaster, famine and pestilence will follow." (Gilbert: 1994, p. 99) Odwira was practiced in other Akan states, and contained similar features.

British and Dutch identified odwira as a yam festival because of the bounty and consumption of the root during the ceremony. Yam was distributed in abundance. Yet the key elements of the festival were not the equitable distribution of food. In this case, food intake became a symbolic gesture as odwira cleansed and fortified the body. Odwira ritually acknowledged all aspects of Asante social life. Its emphasis on power, wealth and authority were symbolic recreations of the foundations of the Asante state. These were essential elements of the state from its inception. Thus, odwira was first commemorated in the days of Osei Tutu. It continued on an annual basis until the head of state was removed by exile from Asante in 1896.

The performance of odwira for over 200 years recreated the past, and involved its participants in a kind of ancestor cult, all of which were exclusively male . Thus, while Asante society was matrilineal, it had developed a cult of the ancestors which was entirely male dominated. Indeed, in the performance of odwira among the matrilineal Akuapem, Gilbert notes a dichotomy between the "political realms" and the mystical or religious elements of the ceremony. The former are referred to by the king and by common consent

as qualities of the "living" or "blood." These are found within the matrilineage The latter category is of the "ancestors" or "character" dimension of the personhood of the king. ,These represent the patrilineage. In these circumstances, odwira serves to assure all Akuapem that in terms of the king, "his physical body is complete or whole; and that his moral character is good." (Gilbert: 1987, p. 313)

In Asante, the deceased were represented by former asantehene and other political figures, as well as important fetish priests, or abosom. Deceased asantehene, and their living counterpart the king, were embodiments of Asante qualities mentioned above. As such, they were the interpreters of history. Indeed, received history of Asante was legitimized solely within authoritative state actions and within their human and ancestral embodied figures. All pivotal categories were described and represented in ceremony as being embodied icons of wealth, power, authority, and other qualities of the state. Indeed, these were the basic facts of history.

Asante values and images rehearsed during performances of odwira included an emphasis on patriliny, matriliny, and the king. Symbolism of the king and state was most cogent during the trip to the royal mausoleum at Bantama near Kumase. An entourage of elites and political leaders was led by the king to the burial site of deceased Asante kings and queens. This rehearsal of the past powers of the state was symbolized as the king paid tribute to former kings by touching the burial site of each one beginning with Osei Tutu. This symbolism of power was strengthened as the group returned to Kumase. They were joined by dancers who paraded the skulls of opponents conquered in battle aloft on brass basins. Power of kingship and the state was further symbolized by the umbrellas which paraded over

the royal procession as it roamed the streets of Kumase or while viewing dancing performances. Umbrellas were related to the symbolism of space. As they were spread over and above the king and other elite, they denoted the distinction made between ordered space of human (Asante) culture and that of antagonistic and dangerous nature. Cultural space was protective and harmonious, and was situated as a condition of coolness. In contrast, nature was disruptive, powerfully foreboding, and symbolized by heat. During odwira, umbrellas recreated a distinction of these two opposing powers.

Washing and purification which also were part of odwira helped to recreate other basic aspects of Asante life, namely matriliny and patriliny and all of their constituent components of personhood: ɔkra, sunsum, mogya, and ntɔrɔ. These features were the basic elements of Asante personhood. All Asante were symbolically cleansed and purified during odwira. Cleansing focused on personhood and its various element. (McCaskie: 1995, p. 169)

Second, annual royal performances of odwira ended in Kumase in 1896. As a procession of state and of pre colonial and traditional Asante life, odwira ceased when the king was exiled even though performances continued in smaller towns for several years. The state was annexed by a colonial power. The ritual restatement of power and wealth that was Asante became silent.

In this chapter, I have emphasized the late nineteenth and early twentieth century transitions in Asante. While I have not (and will not) claimed that Asante society became individuated and fragmented only after the imposition of colonial overrule, I have noted how such measures of colonialism contributed to these rising aspects of Asante society and culture. I have given detail of the British beginnings of Methodism and of its

engagement in the Gold Coast. Methodist became a cultural vanguard. "It insinuated new forms of individualism, new regimes of value, new kinds of wealth, new means and relations of production, new religious practices." (Comaroff and Comaroff: 1997, pp. 163-164)

Heavy emphasis was given in this chapter to focus on the body in various ways during this period of transition and within traditional rituals of state. It was noted that the body was utilized to feature both the qualities of traditional life and of the increasing trends of individuality as found with the impact of colonialism. In this regard, the body became a medium of personhood in new, modernistic forms. In the next chapter, we will see how this aspect of Asante life continued in the declining decades of the nineteenth century and into this century. This reality, however, arose in new and unprecedented ways. The disarray and discontinuity of the times became embodied again; but this new form of embodiment looked inward -- not towards the state -- for its expressions. This period, then, brought forth a new form of embodiment.

All forms of state power were formerly legitimated: wealth, trade, mystical, etc. These features of the state were noted especially during Odwria, which emphasized the social facts of Asante life: matriliny and kingship. Odwira was a festival of cleansing and purifying the king and the state which mediated a ritual bond between the dead, the living and the yet unborn. The end of odwira in 1896 resulted in the cessation of ritual purification of the state and its citizens. State power also encompassed even the personhood and bodily expression of individual Asante. Hegemony applied in this manner creates its own history. Thus, actions which extended beyond the limitations of legitimate state recognized behavior were not truly historic in the traditional Asante fashion of creating history. Akonkofoɔ were

one example of such extended behavior. Pre-colonial Asante was centered on an ideology that combined the materialism of the state with a mystical spirituality. Both forms of power were radically changed in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 4 will show how witch finding movements were another example of such changes in power. Power became manifest in the form of the anti-person: the witch. Movements which arose for detecting the witch also focused on the body, and on its infinite capabilities for expressing discontinuity, evil and illness. Witch finders displayed their own forms of power as they dealt with these fundamental dilemmas of Asante history.

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# HEALING, PERSONHOOD AND POWER: A HISTORY OF WITCH-FINDING IN ASANTE

VOLUME II

By

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Chapter IV

The Creativity of/with Power:

Witchcraft Innovations on Illness in Asante, 1879-1945

## 4.1 Introduction

Data given in this chapter are intended to provide support to the following claims of this thesis. First, there is a profound historical basis to witch finding cults during the period in question, and that the origins of the cults pre-date colonial administration in Asante. Second, the cults themselves changed dramatically, and within the emphasized decades appeared to manifest four distinct phases. Third, these phases are themselves a result of the changing political, religious and economic environment found in West Africa. Medico-religious phenomena relating to witch finding were themselves a series of related but separate historic occurrences. Fourth, the arena of witch finding provides an expanded understanding into dimensions of personhood and power found in Asante during colonialism.

Historical transitions of witch finding outlined in this chapter include four phases. First, the period of political and social uncertainty of the mid nineteenth century included the first recorded witch finding movement in Asante, ɔdomaŋkama, in 1879. Second, no other mention of such a movement is made until the early colonial period. In 1906, the Aberewa movement piqued British fears of lawlessness and disorder, particularly in the wake of rumors of other shrines in West Africa which were seen as forces of political instability. During this period, the Gold Coast government issued its first rulings against the cults. Kunde also made an appearance, and appeared more routinized than Aberewa. It was also less political and included a greater emphasis on healing and medicine. Third, the late

teens brought epidemics of influenza to the region. During this time, other popular cults made their appearance, some of which lasted for decades. Similarities were drawn by the British to the earlier condemned Aberewa; but great emphasis was made on medicines and healing. This period also saw a huge expansion in the vending of medicines and shrine powers for the purposes of healing. Fourth, cults of the 1930s contended with the broad Orders in Council which made any practices of witchcraft or witch finding illegal. This period was filled with attempts to prosecute and incarcerate cult leaders and devotees. Cults also became conspicuous ways of generating large amounts of wealth. By 1945, the British government allowed the cults as forms of indigenous medicine.

The term witch finding or witch catching was first used in reference to these activities in Asante by Rattray's Asante informant Yao Adawua in 1923. Yao Adawua recounted his membership in the 1879 movement known as ɔdomaŋkama, and explained how he survived the order of execution by Mensa Bonsu. He told Rattray that his training "did not come from anyone." Rather, the "spirit" of a mystical power "came upon me like the wind, and thus I learned who were the witches and how to catch them." (Rattray: 1927, p. 29) Rattray thus referred to the priest as a "witch-finder." The term was likewise used by Fortes in 1945 to an assortment of shrine oriented movements involved in the detection of identities of witches.

Sometime around 1908, during a dramatic surge in religious, healing and popular movements in the Gold Coast, an anonymous author wrote 26 of the prescriptions which were demanded of those who committed themselves to the Kunde shrine in southern Asante. This list is a typical example of the restrictions, sanctions, prohibitions and penalties

which were placed upon the adherents of any particular fetish or of its ɔkɔmfɔ. The list, therefore, provides an illustration of contemporary dealings of fetish priests and their followers in the early twentieth century Gold Coast. The items included the following.

> Regulations in connection with Kunde:
> 1. If you steal, Kunde shall catch you.
> 2. If you are a witch or wizard, Kunde shall catch you.
> 3. If you charm somebody to die Kunde shall catch you.
> 4. If you persuade somebody's wife to divorce her husband so that you might marry her, you are to be affected by Kunde.
> 5. If you have drunk this fetish & join with somebody who does not drink it and you swear any other fetish, Kunde shall affect you.
> 6. If you are called as witness in any tribunal you must pray to Kunde before you speak. If you swear any other fetish, Kunde shall affect you.
> 7. If you over charge your brother or any man, Kunde shall affect you.
> 8. If you take something from your neighbor's farm and you forget to tell him — to confess it — when asked, Kunde shall affect you.
> 9. If the wife of any man who has drunk Kunde commits adultery and does not tell — or confess — it to the husband, she shall be affected by Kunde.
> 10. If you have drunk Kunde and then go to somebody's wife, you will not escape when her husband arrives. If you escape, Kunde shall affect you.
> 11. You must not ask any seller of meat whether the meat was a dead animal. If you ask this before you buy the meat, Kunde shall affect you.
> 12. If somebody puts poison in rum — any drinkable — for you, you shall freely drink it but Kunde shall affect that man.
> 13. If a child, through anger, refuses to take food but afterwards comes to eat it, you are not to ask that child anything. If you do, Kunde shall affect you.
> 14. If you marry two wives, you will share all things to them. If one's share is greater than the other's — if you sleep with one more than the other — Kunde shall affect you.
> 15. If you commit adultery, you are not to lie together with your wife — or husband as the case may be. If you lie with her (or him) Kunde shall affect you.
> 16. If you say to your son or daughter — your offspring — he or she is a wizard or witch, Kunde shall affect you.
> 17. If a husband or a wife refuses a present from the wife or from the husband but takes it afterwards, that party shall be affected.
> 18. The one who swears Kunde on his neighbor and the neighbor dies, is liable to pay a fine of 5 — plus one cow, and he alone shall bury the dead.
> 19. If any property of a person who drinks Kunde is lost, he should ask the "gongon" beater to beat "gongon" for him before he commits it to Kunde.
> 20. If anyone who drinks Kunde is bitten by snake, he should first pray to Kunde,

and if he does not get well he can then resort to any other medicine.
21. If the wife of any man who drinks Kunde gets conceived, the husband should not tie string "Fuke" round her waist.
22. The Kunde Priest must not force any man to drink Kunde. It must be drunk from free will.
23. If the man who drinks Kunde shoots at an animal, & the animal tries to catch him, he shall call Kunde to kill the animal for him. If Kunde kills the animal, he shall throw some pieces of the meat in the field (bush) before bringing the rest home. If he does not do this and somebody eats of the flesh of this meat, that man shall die.
24. The drinker of Kunde can entrust his farm to Kunde; the cola must be thrown into your own and not another man's farm.
25. If you and your neighbor drink this fetish Kunde, you must not go to disclose his secrets (confessions.) If you do this, Kunde shall affect you, for you have ways to make your neighbor incur debt.
26. If the Kunde Priest calls (has dealings with) someone's wife, he is liable to a fine of 5, two bottles of gin, and one cow. The same shall be paid by anyone who is with his wife. (NAG: A.D.M., 23/1/213)

These admonitions were scribed by either European administrators who witnessed shrine performances first hand, or by literate Africans who transcribed the requirements as a testimonial to the government of their lacking any illegal content. The prescriptions are behavioral precepts which devotees of the Kunde shrine were obliged to follow when seeking its protective abilities and medicinal healing powers. Control of witchcraft and detection of witches in Asante were important powers held by traditional healers, shrine priests and mystical agents. Asante recognized that they individually lacked the power to prevent or control witchcraft. Instead, abosom and their human counterparts, were acknowledged as having such power. This power was accessed by ordinary humans after ritually enabling the abosom as having the capacity to protect and to heal.

However, to retain the full force of the spirit's protection, the individual covenanted to live the restrictions of the shrine. (Bannerman-Richter: 1982, p. 108) The precepts represent an example of the kinds of taboos on behavior which were common in

Asante witch finding movements. Once affiliated with a shrine, the individual relied on its spiritual power for protection, health and prosperity. Protection from witchcraft of one's "soul" became the work and responsibility of the shrine. (Bannerman-Richter: 1982, p. 108) Persons who pledged an allegiance to shrines for protection, and who thereby covenanted to live according to the laws of the fetish shrine, were often asked to swear an oath to the shrine. Such oaths were commonly known as "drinking fetish." Oaths supposedly had the power to both protect and to kill. This accord between oaths and their sworn consequences is consistent with Asante practice of basing oaths on particularly heinous circumstances. In the event that someone swore an oath, and was lying, something similar would befall him. Thus the sacred Oath of Asante, Memeneda Akromanti, is derived from the death in battle of an Asantehene, who died on a Saturday (Memeneda). (Priestly and Wilks: 1960, p. 91) Swearing an oath of allegiance to a shrine fetish and its medicinal powers recalled the power of such acts of allegiance during the pre-colonial State.

The Great Oath of Asante was instituted by Osei Tutu's nephew and successor, Opuku Ware, as a national pledge of allegiance, "not only to assure the Asante that Osei Tutu's spirit continued to guide the nation, but also to reunite and rekindle their fighting spirit and to achieve the purposes for which the Asante Union had been called into being." (Flynn: 1971, p. 60) The sanction of the Great Oath was characteristically political and religious. The King replied to the chief who had sworn the Oath, "Sɛ woyɛ me dɔm da a, abosom nku wo." --"If you ever rebel against me, may the gods kill you." (Aidoo: 1975, p. 32) Transgression of the Oath was therefore both an offence against the gods, and an open act of political rebellion and defiance. Capital punishment for open rebellion was decisive.

Power of the shrines retrained this same immediacy of conviction for defying an oath to the abosom. Thus, if one "goes contrary to them [oaths and laws of the fetish] a punishment of sickness is preferred by the fetish which, if not quickly attended by the fetish priest, death becomes the result." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/213)

Kunde was thus described by Kwadu Tawia as "drinking medicine against witchcraft, poison medicine, and bad medicine." Those who would "drink fetish" of Kunde were required to submit to its powers of surveillance of witchcraft and anti-social behaviors.

> When you are about to drink of this you ought to be assured if you are in possession of any of the above mentioned [medicines] and if you do not tell the whole truth before drinking, the medicine will then cath you. If you are in possession of any of the above [medicines] and stop doing it, after you have drunk the medicine it will do you no harm...If he fails to report all what he has done with his bad medicine, then he will die through his bad doings. (NAG: A.D.M. 229/1923)

Shrine powers were regarded as both mightier than witches and as the only mystical power capable of controlling witchcraft and disclosing witch identities. Once an individual swore such an oath, they could identify a witch by the color in their eyes. Witches, in turn, knew immediately when they had been identified. Consequently, they fled from the powers abiding within the oath taking person. Debrunner quotes a chief who forced Christians in his town to undergo drinking the poison ordeal in order to reveal witches.

> What else could I do? The blessing has departed from our town. We work hard but never achieve anything. The fertility of the soil declines. Snails are nowhere to be seen nowadays — and they were our main trading product and the food we like most. Less children are born and more babies die. We are afflicted by many diseases. There must be witches about. Therefore I have told the fetish man to find the guilty ones. (Debrunner: 1961, pp. 66-67.)

Similar movements appeared on the horizon by the dozens throughout the entire Gold Coast, particularly in those areas which were strongly influenced by European

expansionist tendencies of capitalism and Christianity. The coastal Ewe, for example, used the mystical abilities of the yewe shrine to "alleviate barrenness and to provide protection in war" (Greene: 1996, p. 95) during the German and Danish colonial era of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Other movements making use of shrines to protect or reveal witches were registered from coastal communities into the twentieth century.

For example, the following letter was written from the Fanti region near Cape Coast. By 1930, the colonial government had taken strong measures to suppress and make illegal the performances of witch finding. Such actions were extremely heavily lobbied by the Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist missions to take such administrative steps. Populations of many towns and villages who believed the legal restrictions should not apply to the fetishes of their communities made official supplications to local authorities, and even to the governor, for sympathy and relief. This letter from May, 1930 is an example of such a plea. It was authored by the chief of the village. The letter is entitled, "Importation of Tongor medicine for the use and protection of the people of Agona town in the Elmina — Cape Coast District."

> I have the honor to inform the Government that the people Agona in the Elmina District Central Province have imported to the town of Agona a Medicine by the name of Tongor Medicine from FRA FRA in Northern Territories of the Gold Coast for the purpose of protecting the town of Agona from being destroyed by witch crafts, robbers and other Evil Spirits that generally interfere with the prosperity of town or village, and I shall be obliged if Your Worship will grant your permission for the use of this Tongor Medicine by the people of Agona.
> This medicine is harmless to human health, but its purpose is to exterminate all witch crafts, robbers, and other Evil Spirits, and it is the wish of all my people to have in their midst this Tongor Medicine for the purpose of preventing any bad conduct on the part of witch crafts and other Evil Spirits and this will serve as a check to them. This application is made by me on behalf of all the chiefs, elders, and people of Agona and trust that my humble application will be favorably considered.

> We are prepared to produce for your inspection on your next visit to Agona Town this Tongor Medicine.
> That the whole people of Agona including myself have drank this Tongor Medicine and we consider it a good one, not in any way objectionable.
> This Tongor Medicine has cost us the sum of 150 to be introduced to Agona, and I am happy to state that this amount has been liquidated by the whole people of Agona.
> It is also used in searching for a missing property, and offenders are brought to light by this Tongor Medicine.
> Thank you in anticipation. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/213)

The letter is then signed by Nana Terpor, who wrote the letter in English after receiving it first in Fanti by the chief of Agona. The letter is also signed by five other chiefs from areas in the vicinity of Agona.

A third letter witnessing a similar plea for legitimacy was written four years earlier. This letter was also signed by chiefs, and several members of a village. The letter is included in this introduction to provide an example of how local practitioners of witch finding movements were conscious of the place of these movements within traditional Asante, and other Akan, notions of religion and cosmology. Moreover, the data provided in such letters display an interpretation of culture and history. The letter is written to a local British official. It is dated November 18, 1926.

> We have the honor to inform you that there is a fetish called Antuah in this Division and is attached to the Stool of Assim Attandaso as the State God.
> Its habitat is the Konkom Forest and is worshiped on Fridays. Its present priest is one Kwesie Appianyin.
> The fetish possesses the power of giving relief of sick persons, and is consulted by the State every year as to what will be the fortune of the Division on every new year.
> As we do not want this sacred Fetish to be disturbed by the police, in the event of the suspecting that it is either Aberewa or Whemesu [Hwe me so], we venture to bring its existence to the notice of the Government, and we shall be pleased if you will give the Regent a license to look after the Fetish for the Division. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/213)

The chiefs who wrote this letter speak of the legitimacy of the shrine: its

affiliation with sacred stools and consequently with local government, its medicinal and healing capacities, its routinized ritual performances, and, most importantly, its differing in substance and practice from Aberewa. The chiefs who operated the shrine thus implore the British officials to accept the legitimacy of the shrine as a vehicle for the affairs of state, and in its mystical powers to heal. Shrines had power both within local politics and the abilities to reach into the unseen world and alleviate maladies in this life.

More detail of the period of transition in Asante history from 1879 to 1940 will now be given. It will look at methods of interpretation of events and processes which occurred during this period. Specifically, it will draw upon the data found in the National Archives of Ghana concerning witch finding movements. These movements initially concentrated on the maladies of the Asante state as perceived by a sizeable number of individuals who made up their ranks. However, by the beginning of this century, Asante were part of the Colony. Those affiliated with witch-finding cults no longer participated in creating conditions of political power and mythically based subversion at the margins of the state. Rather, they now saw the cults as methods of recreating Asante identity within a rapidly changing world. Cults appeared decreasingly political, and increasingly oriented toward problem solving. Problems of cult affiliates were individual encounters with misfortune and evil. They dealt with general conditions of illness, health, individual prosperity, death, and other related issues. It will thus be argued that what was once part of a public and historic forum of historic and cultural meaning became increasing dissonant. New methods were imagined and created for conveying new forms of experiences. These experiences, however, continued to be expressed through embodied and personal forms of

experience.

The proponents will be seen in a struggle for liberation and legitimization within colonial existence and hegemony. Movements will be seen as a means of resistance to colonial powers. The cults will also be seen in their earliest forms, as they attempted to reconstruct Asante history. The chapter begins with a more detailed discussion of the make up of the person within Asante, and how personhood and identity relate to the various details of witch finding and their historic and cultural contexts.

**4.2 Personhood in Asante.**

This section examines the Asante notion of personhood. A major reason for describing this concept is to provide a background for understanding the concept of human agency in regards to practices of bayi (witchcraft, especially within the matrilineage) and to witch finding. Another reason is to understanding the relationship between the human person and non human entities such as the bush or unembodied mystical entities. Data is taken from published sources, from unpublished manuscripts, and from my own interviews in Kumase and in Michigan.

When speaking of a man (or woman), Asante invariably refer to various constituent elements of personhood. These elements are either four or six in number. The essential four given in most sources are a person's bogya or blood, the sunsum or spirit, the ɔkra or soul, and the honam or body. The other two elements of personhood which are not always identified as aspects of the person are his saman, or the spirit after death and his sasa, a sense of justice found in the saman. These various aspects of personhood have been described as present to some degree in all adult Asante. They may be explored further.

Bogya (plural, and commonly used: mogya) is considered to be the blood of an individual. It is also described as "that element of a man which grows to become his visible human flesh." (AU: ASSM: [n.d.a], p. 1) Thus, the concept implies much more than the English word blood, even though blood is the common referential image. Blood sustains the body. Without blood, there is no life, and thus no body. But in Asante, bogya is derived directly from the mother matrilineal kin. Throughout a lifetime, the individual derives great personal identity through the bonds centered within his or her lineage. All who descend from the same mother, even someone who is extended genealogically, are considered to sustain the same bogya. This notion of bogya is therefore fundamental to the Asante matrilineage, which is itself the basis for the traditional order of social existence. All those who trace their descent to a common ancestress are considered to belong to the same clan, or abusua. There are seven abusua in Asante. The localized lineages of the clan are identified as bogya. Thus, any individual refers to close maternal relations as bogyani. The suffix ni is used to personify impersonal substances. The clan and the lineage provided the most predominating source of identity for individual Asante. They were also considered the unequivocal basis of society, although both were subject to state intervention.

Those who identify themselves as sharing the same bogya are strictly forbidden from marriage to one another. Sexual relations among these individuals is considered incest. In the past, instances of sexual relations between such individuals was punishable by death or a severe fine. The term bogya is also used to imply close physical, as well as social relations. Although the term could conceivably be applied to sexual relations between animals, it is never given this association. Therefore, it is implied that

animals do not keep the same rules of exogamy. By extension, a conceptual distinction is made between animals and humans in this regard. This is the first distinction between the realm of culture (humans and the community) and that of nature.

Because the matrilineage is heavily identified with the physical images of flesh or blood, it is not surprising that the predominant aspects of its perpetuity are also physical or material. Thus, the lineage is maintained through a succession between generations of property and houses, as well as money, aspects of gold, cloths, livestock and other moveable forms of wealth. Many of these items, such as clothing, were regarded as extensions of the human body. This was seen above with the new class of elites, akonfofo.

Contrasting to such material objects, there are also physical properties of the person which are constituent features of an individual's sunsum. This may be loosely translated into English as spirit. Sunsum, or both spirit and personality. In humans, it is a physical endowment given to a person by the father. It provides both character and individuality. It is possible to distinguish between individuals because of his or her sunsum. Members of the same abusua or bogya are likely to be distinguished by reference to their sunsum. It is through this patrilineal concept that persons receive this individualizing principle.

Sunsum is the basis of patrilineal non localized groups known as ntɔrɔ. Ntɔrɔ implies words which "identify this people. A chief will recite words which will indicate he is from a certain house or clan." The latter is ntɔrɔ. Rattray reports the number of ntɔrɔ to be nine. Others, such as Fortes, say the number is twelve. Members of the same ntɔrɔ respect the same totems and observe similar taboos. Members of a ntɔrɔ are regarded

to possess like mystical or spiritual qualities and capacities. They are thereby noted for the abilities to be courteous, cunning, clever, and of possessing anger, pride, etc. Ntɔrɔ thus refers to both a patrilineal group, and to the aspects of personality contained within persons of the same group. Ntɔrɔ is often used as a synonym for semen. Thus, it contains its own physical dimensions. Notions of bogya and ntɔrɔ are both considered to have man made origins. Notions of sunsum and ɔkra are considered to be created by divinity. (Gyekye: 1995, p. 94)

Sunsum also refers to all "unperceivable, mystical beings and forces in" Asante ontology. (Gyekye: 1995, p. 88) Every created thing, every natural object, has or contains a sunsum. The sunsum is believed to possess and control various kinds of mystical power. First, sunsum is considered to be the activating and life giving force of the person. Second, non human entities such as animals, and even non human objects such as trees may also possess sunsum. In the possession of sunsum, Being is not restricted to human persons. The sika dwa kofi, for example, was considered to possess a sunsum. This quality of ontological existence is shared by other West African peoples. Thus, from "the Kuranko point of view the field of social relationships may include totemic animals, ancestors, bush spirits, a divine creator, fetishes, as well as man." (Jackson: 1982, p. 17) In Asante, relations between man and the various entities which possess sunsum were never static. The sunsum of these non human entities and objects was described to be weak or strong, or totally absent. Humans with weak sunsum are easily disturbed, or may easily contract diseases, or may be obvious victims of witchcraft. They also may lack the will to bring retribution or judgment on others who offend them.

A person's sunsum may leave the body during sleep, and it was then susceptible to dreaming and to other night time related powers such as witchcraft. "Bad sunsum may be in collusion with such evil agencies as witches and sorcerers, and are bent on causing hardship to human beings, and their property." (AU: ASSM, [n.d.a], p. 4) This fact of malice of spirit was noted in a testimonial given by a woman who killed her sister by witchcraft. "I killed my sister by taking the Spirit out of her. I did not actually touch the body nor did I poison her...I killed my sister during the Influenza Epidemic. I killed her by witchcraft. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243) More durable or "strong" sunsum was likely to resist the possibilities of both illness and witchcraft.

Because of the powers associated with sunsum, one should never harbor grievances, cause physical or social harm, or defile the reputation of another person or entity. Such actions or intentions may bring about severe penalties and consequences. For example, court documents found within the Sir Charles Harper papers of Rhodes House, Oxford, contain dozens of cases before the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast Colony in which persons have committed various crimes or have violated, stolen, attempted to steal, or defiled the sika dwa kofi during the early years of British rule. These cases illustrate the capacity to pollute or defile sunsum of others, including the Golden Stool, which could be assaulted unless protected. One such case was brought in April 1, 1913 against David Augustus Boaten. Boaten is accused of theft and fraud in a case of money doubling, an early practice where one individual placed a sum of money in the confidence of a second person who claimed to be able to double the money by mystical means. The charge was brought against Boaten by W.R. Townsend, Attorney General to the Colony. Boaten,

> did defraud one Yaw Adjai of money to the amount of 30 by false pretense to wit by pretending that he had the power to double money by magic and to turn water into silver against the form of the Ordinance in such case made and provided against the peace of our Lord the King his Crown and dignity.

In defense, Boaten told the court that in January, 1912:

> I was at Komfrodua and I went to some man my own uncle for 20 to purchase cocoa and he said he would not afford me such amount as I was not strong enough to work with the money. So I was surprised at hearing such a word from my uncle, so I proposed to do magic to make money in some way.

Other people heard of the intentions and abilities of Boaten, and gave him various sums of 100, 200, and 300 in order for him to perform the same magic for them. Boaten did not turn away the currency, for, as he noted, "as a fowl cannot refuse corn I did not refuse the money. As they don't know how to use money they give it to me and I use it for myself." (RH: CHP, box 1) The defendant then plead guilty, and was sentenced to a fine and time in jail. The trial was to punish the theft, but also to recognize the affront made by Boaten to the sunsum of others.

An event from 1921 illustrates the perceived calamity which was perceived to have befallen upon all Asante as a result of the disappearance of the sika dwa kofi. In October, 1921, it was supposed that the sika dwa kofi had been buried for protection, and then lost and a road had been built over its burial site. It was then retrieved, but then rumored to have been stolen. Police accused two men "of robbing the Golden Stool."

> When the news became public the excitement and consternation were intense. All Ashantis put on mourning, and poured in from neighboring villages to learn if the rumors were true. Some attempt was made by young men to loot the Coomasie Market. *There was a good deal of wild talk* and there were *very sinister possibilities in the state of feeling and ill informed resentment.* Precautions were taken to deal at once with any possible emergency.
> However, as the facts became known the sympathy of Europeans and foreign natives

> was with the Ashantis in their outrage and degradation their national sentiment had suffered, and as the days wore on and the Ashantis began to realize that there would be no attempt to take advantage of distress, but that they had the sympathy of the "strangers," the feeling of general resentment focused itself upon those accused of complicity in the crime. (RH: CHP, box #3, emphasis added)

It was said of the thief that, "by his negligence he has brought a degradation on the Ashanti nation." This declaration was signed by 24 witnesses. Another court document stated the wishes for justice made by Asante present at the trial. "The sentences recommended by the chiefs were death ... and imprisonment for life with confiscation of their goods." (RH: CHP, box #3) Protecting the sika dwa kofi was equivalent to defending the collective sunsum of Asante against defilement. Vilification of the Stool was imagined to generate illness within the order of society. The examples shows how the sunsum of persons and objects were assaulted. In the case of the Golden Stool, the national symbol, its sunsum contained powerful capacities of harm

Each and every Asante was considered a social being, an embodied form of both man made substances and those appointed by divinity. Likewise, each Asante was considered to be a emblem of a continuum between those who are deceased and those who are yet to be born. As such, each was viewed as an individually embodied configuration of Asante existence. This configuration included the concept of individually created destiny or personal fate, or ɔkrabea. Thus, a vital portion of every person was the soul or ɔkra. The soul contained a person's destiny, or message from God. This is known as ɔkrabea. It is that portion given to man by Onyame which makes them distinguishable as human beings. It thus includes a reality which is antecedent to language and society. There is a close link between destiny and the soul. It is a person's destiny which fashions his or her talents,

dispositions, and inclinations. The concept has more aptly been described as the embodied form of destiny. Asante believe that it is life itself which provides a stage for the unveiling of these dimensions of the individual. A person's ɔkrabea is thus given expression through experience.

It is noted in the literature how a person may have a "bad" destiny, and this may effect his or her soul. Thus, one writer described ɔkra, or soul, as being issued from God, and possessing qualities which have been influenced by his destiny.

> As the ɔkra is supposed to emanate from God, and God is the source of everything that is, the final explanation of all phenomena, good luck and ill luck are associated with it. One who comes by an unexpected fortune, or escapes from a disaster or has some unusual experience, is said to "have a good ɔkra." This is the case especially when the feature is permanent or common in his life. On the other hand, one who, time and again, meets with misfortune or hardship has a "bad ɔkra. (AU: ASSM: [n.d., a], p. 6)

Archival records note how bad ɔkra was sometimes identified as a "second soul," and which accounted for unfortunate events and misfortunes which were likely to occur to some individuals in suspicious frequency. Herr Adam Mischlick, for example, writes of the concept in relation to the Dente fetish and its sacrificial rituals invoked in cases of illness and misfortune.

> The natives of the two divisions worship the human soul and make her sacrifices. Every man has got two souls (one in heaven.) Should a member of a family become ill, a child die, business is not going well or any other misfortune befall one, the Fetish Priest or Priestess is consulted to get to know the cause of it. The Fetish Priest as a rule then goes to the Country Fetish the famous Dente (Odente) to ask for advice. The usual answer the people receive is their Okra [ɔkra] or Kanakra or both have caused the evil (also the spirit of the deceased parents) and a sacrifice has to be made. According to the answer and instructions received from the Fetish Priest, the people have some human Figures made out of clay, standing about 1 foot high (as a rule made by the Fetish Priestess.) (NAG: A.D.M. : 11/1/751)

Mischlick then referred to the figures made which symbolize the male, female, or child on whose ritual behalf the figures are made. This statement is consistent with the Asante concept of personhood. As noted above, Asante view the relationship between the soul and the body as on of interaction. Not only does the body have a causal influence on the soul; but the soul has a causal influence on the body. What happens within or to the soul often takes its effect or reflects on the condition of the body. When the soul is endangered or injured by evil beings, its effects are manifest in bodily symptoms. The result is ill health. The images were identified with the ɔkra of the patient. Rites which aimed at healing the soul would also heal the body.

> A sheep or fowl is sacrificed and the blood of the animals is sprinkled over these figures, also some hair or feathers of the animals are dipped into the blood and put on those Figures that they cannot fall off but stick on it. The meat of the sacrificed animal is afterwards cooked and eaten by the people and three small bits of the food is thrown into the bush.
> In having made this sacrifice the evil is banished, for instance one child had died and there would be others, they would be safe. When the husband dies his Okra [ɔkra] is thrown into the bush as a rule near the piece of the great Dente Fetish which is found at the entrance of every village. The same happens when the wife dies but in case both should die the two Okra [ɔkra] and the Kanakra are thrown away.
> There are people who believe that after death the Soul returns to heaven; others that the Soul will choose a tree near by as the future domicile. No exact statements can be obtained from the natives...
> The natives have the firm belief that there is a contact between the Fetish and those beings in heaven and that they communicate with each other.
> When the animals are sacrificed, such words are spoken as: "Today I give thee a fowl (sheep) that all evil (Musu) is taken from me. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/751)

In pre-colonial Asante, the practice of ritually cleansing or "washing" the ɔkra was performed in order to make it pleasing to Onyame. This practice was done weekly on the day of birth of the head of the household. The custom continues into the present; however, it is now performed for a person after he or she has escaped some sort of peril or

dangerous event.

Honhom, like ɔkra, is considered to be generative from the powers of Onyame. Asante feel honhom is part of Onyame. It is the substance that makes humans persons and other living forms breathe and live. Death takes place when honhom leaves the body. The body then becomes still and lifeless. Separation of various bodily components begins; and the honhom returns to Onyame. At the point of death, ɔkra also returns to Onyame "to justify its earthly existence." Bodies of most Asante are buried within grounds held and maintained by the abusua, while royalty were interred within the royal mausoleum. At this point also, the sunsum is transformed into saman [ghost], and proceeds to enter a new existence at the place of the dead, asamando.

Care is always taken with the dead. Disgruntled or malcontent saman may wreck vengeance on the living. This is done through the sasa, or the vindictive portion of the saman. Asante sometimes attribute feelings of remorse or guilt to one's sasa. "It is that aspect of a man's saman or sunsum which makes another man sick or feel uneasy or confess his guilty, or lose his life when he has done something wrong against his personality." (AU: ASSM: [n.d. a], p. 10) Normally, the sasa is activated only after death; but pre-death activation does transpire

Like sunsum, other non-animated and non-human entities also have aspects of sasa. Sasa was also considered as an unruly and disquieted forced in nature. It had not strict boundaries of interpretation and knowing; and as such, sasa was often deeply ambiguous to the concerns and conduct of human culture. Sasa was therefore subject to widely varying degrees of power, and of agency and manifestations of the exertion of willful

actions. In some sasa, this agency presented itself to Asante as a metaphor of unpredictable, haphazard and ruinous capacities. There were, in fact, certain persons and specific types of animals which were known and identified to display the actions of unpredictable agency. (AU: ASSM: [n.d. a], p. 4) Most notable of such ambiguous animals of the forest was the bongo antelope with its color symbolisms of black, white and red. (McCaskie: 1992) Impetus for such actions is never clear; but unruly sunsum or sasa were often suspected. In this regard, transitions were made between the realm of human culture and nature.

But in Asante cosmology, agency was recognized only partially as something immaterial. Sasa and sunsum which provoked actions and behaviors of alarming and dangerous proportions were further encompassed in corporeal existence. Such agency, in other words, always assumed some aspects of physicality. Other worldly (mystical) actions promoting good or bad results among humans were hardly ever without their dimensions in the lived world of Asante experience. Thus, certain persons and particular beasts were identified as embodied representations of potential ruinous, unfortunate, and damaging behaviors and intentions. These became known as the bearers of misfortune, of anomaly, and of illness. Among beings which had human physical forms, these entities were identified as witches. Witches were known as "wicked people. It is their wicked feelings which cause their witchcraft to do harm." (Appiah-Kubi: 1983, p. 262) Among beings of the forest, the antelope and other beasts were recognized symbols of such danger.

It may be argued, therefore, that such beings represent a transition from one form of existence to another. The two kinds of existence were known to Asante thought as human culture and nature. These two forms of existence represented stark extremes in

Asante existence. Its existential origins are framed within the rise of the Asante state, when Osei Tutu and Komfo Anokye were associated with the mythical creation of the beginnings of the military and agricultural society. These origins arose from within the surrounding confines of a dense rain forest at the dawn of the eighteenth century. "Resistant, recalcitrant, anarchic, irruptively fertile, physically overbearing, and above all alien in its blank otherness, the forest as an encroaching environment stood ever ready to subvert and to annihilate the niche of cultural space." (McCaskie: 1992, p. 227)

This articulation continued throughout traditional Asante history. The forest, the domain of the wild, stood as a reserve of potential physical and mystical threat of harm to human existence. Powers of the forest were always unpredictable and uncontrollable. Its various forces appeared only as a danger and a threat. Domesticated space, ofie, was contrasted physically and morally with wild space, wura. Boundaries (kurotia) which separated the two domains were transition zones of uncertain content. Accordingly, all anomalous objects and persons were identified and either eliminated or were escorted out of the boundaries of culture and into kurotia, and toward the domain of the wild. Conversely, all powers originating in the wild were ushered into the realm of culture and community first through the confines of kurotia. Its liminal status was thus obtained. This transition from culture to nature was noted by an Asante informant of Meyer Fortes.

> In the time before the Forestry Department there was no modern forest reserves as one sees today. The thickness of the forest provided the substance for the superstition then in vogue. There were some little men in the forest behind K.M.'s house. Sometimes when under the influence or obsessed, the priestess (ɔkɔmfɔ) rushed into the thick forest. She was often rendered invisible by the roadside. Sometimes she would come back with her hands tied behind her back. Who did this? The little men of the forest — Mmoatia. When she rushed into the forest behind the

house couldn't she answer nature? (MF: ASSM: 1945e)

The various elements of Asante personhood and of personality in Asante cosmology are themselves objects of negotiation and interpretation. Of the four basic elements of personhood, two were human in origin. These two may be further categorically linked to properties of gender. The human elements were often paired with their mystical counterpart in the understanding of human action and the course of life. The pairs were also divided according to contrasts of gender categories. Both categories of ntɔrɔ and ɔkra, for example, were considered male and were both "washable" in ritual. Likewise, the female element of bogya was understood as linked with witchcraft (bayi), as something connected with the concept of "blood." We have already seen how sunsum is linked with the "bush," even specifically with mystical non human beings of the forest, mmoatia.

Such pairings are considered when specific and questionable actions and events warrant and demand understanding which is not within the realm of ordinary human existence. In Asante, this often implied illness, since "health and disease are inextricably connected with socially approved behavior and moral conduct." (Appiah-Kubi: 1983, p. 26) There was no fixed pairing of these categories, however. Rather a non definitive method of discovery of linkages was in order according to the wide range of subtle and often contradictory aspects of human behavior, morality, intentions, and actions.

Thus, consideration of personhood in Asante involved a total and complete reckoning of the various possibilities of combinations and linkages of the constituent elements. These were then adjusted to account for behaviors within a spectrum of anticipated and unanticipated sorts. Thus, an ɔkɔmfɔ revealed to Fortes in 1945, "There are

some bad men in the world. Some of them inherit wickedness from their fathers. Some bad men are not men. They may be bad spirits (sunsum) who came to be born by women." (MF:ASSM, 1945h) Underlying this spectrum were Asante notions of male/female relations, and the inconclusive and potentially harmful opposition between culture and nature. Both structures were fraught with tensions. At times, tensions of these constituent elements resolved themselves within the context of community. (Gyekye: 1992) At other times, the individual emerged and was distinguishable from the community as if individually separated from a "cluster of trees." (Gyekye: 1988) The Asante person was thus "an end in himself or herself in a microscopic perspective." (Gyekye: 1989, p. 49) At this level, the historic mediation of the Asante state were largely unaccountable for and unable to determine the actions and intentions of individuals who were at odds with the state, or whose existence ventured too far into the wild.

**4.3 Mythical Realities: Komfo Anokye in the Nineteenth Century**

Data presented in the second and third chapters are intended to support the proposition that the pre-colonial Asante state was grounded in foundations of political and military articulation. The predatory state was formed through conquests under the leadership of Osei Tutu. The state was symbolized with the mystical power of the sika dwa kofi, brought to earth late in the seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries through the direction and miraculous abilities of Komfo Anokye.

The Asante state has thus appeared to some observers as a wondrous and majestic political and legal machine in which the structures of everyday life are the result of the historic legacy laid down at the commencement of the eighteenth century. (Wilks: 1975)

This historiography and political romanticism of Wilks is joined by the empiricism of Fortes. He spoke frequently of the Asante "jural domain" which he saw as, "the temporally conceptualized, militarily organized and quasi-historically sanctioned state based on the rule of judicially administered law and the majesty of kingship." (Fortes: 1969, p. 160) Together with the clan and lineage, this framework comprised a "total social structure." The approach combined the social charter of Malinowski and the formalism of Radcliffe-Brown. History appears as an architectural given, a method of recreating mythical characters in order to substantiate the workings of the various statuses of structure.

In such a perspective, the individual nearly vanishes from the horizon. Intentions and intentionality of singular persons are reduced to a framework of muted discourse beneath the noise of the structural workings of political processes. Within this framework, personhood is limited to the roles and statuses of social performance. Social structure, norms and relations provide contexts for personhood. The socially defined and endowed person is a being within these offices and positions; and that being is given his or her definition within the various domains of society. (Fortes: 1969)

While such an approach has merit in the discovery of social offices, statuses, and roles, it does not address other complexities of personal actions and communal relations such as those mentioned above in connection with Asante personhood. The realities of concepts of personhood such as the Asante soul and destiny have little representation within this approach. Moreover, this view tends to ignore other conditions in society and history. Ambiguities, disruptive tendencies, communal discontinuities, or the ability to calculate uncertainty, displacement, and terror within reflective (re)assessment are part of the Asante

experience and history in the late nineteenth century. Local responses to mystical forces indicate much more than shifts in political machinery or conflicts in structure. Self reflection and individual action demonstrate the diffuse character of power, and its distributive and expansive qualities. In movements of witch finding in 1870s, Asante provided token examples of reflective moments of the creativity and negotiation of power at the level of the individual.

Asante routinized profound and elaborate notions of pollution and a sense of spatial relations which polarized settlement and forest. These fundamental notions involved protection against the undisclosed, threats from the wild, and creatures of nature. Asante history was a continuously revealing thread of capabilities for confronting such worldly and supernatural forces. The result was a culture of anxious and fragile abilities which have proven capable of momentarily denying threat, disaster, illness and disorder. Particular national symbols and persons of renown are recognized as the creators and conveyors of this order. One such individual was Komfo Anokye.

Komfo Anokye was collaborator in the foundation of the Asante state. He codified a set of laws, gave council to the first Asantehene Osei Tutu, performed miracles, founded odwira, and is recognized as premier to the status and power of akɔmfoɔ. All of these honors of state, however, are mythological constructs as the historical figure of Komfo Anokye likely never existed. Bosman speaks of a great priest who worked many miracles at the outset of the eighteenth century. However, the priest is never mentioned by name.

> The Inland Negroes make those Blacks who live amongst us believe, that a great Feticheer or Priest lives in a very fine House with them; of which they relate nothing but Miracles: They affirm that he commands the Weather, that he can make it come

> down soft or hard at his Pleasure and drive it out again; that though his House is without any Roof, yet it is always sheltered from Rain; that he not only knows all things past, but can as accurately foretell all future Events as if they were present before his Eyes, and cures all sorts of Distempers...
> From hence you may easily infer whether this Negroe is not incredibly Reverenced and Esteemed by his Country-men; and indeed they look upon him as a sort of Demi-God: so slyly hath this Rogue insinuated this great Opinion of himself into the Minds of his Neighbours that (this being no old Story, the Priest at present living) they every Day relate fresh Miracles of him. (Bosman: 1977, pp. 156-157)

The actual historical existence of Komfo Anokye, as noted by McCaskie (1986), is of secondary importance to his status as *the* central figure in Asante law and morality. A quote from a manuscript found in the Manhiya Palace Records Office in Kumase will help to provide a context for the historic importance of Komfo Anokye.

> Barikorang, the son of Awere, returned from travel with a fetish called Apafram [odwira] and told the King [Osei Tutu] that he bought the fetish, but because of its methods of worship, he found that only the King could keep it; he therefore wished to transfer it to him.
> The King consulted Komfo Anokye whether it was a good fetish which would contribute in a large measure to the well being of the whole Asante Nation, and that it would help the King in all his wars to conquer all his enemies, and that any King whom he would conquer and kill, he should put his skull into it. The King therefore bought the fetish from Barikorang who showed the King how it was worshiped. Komfo Anokye further advised the King to set aside one day in the year for the worship of the fetish. This festival should be attended by all the provincial chiefs in state, with their subjects, in order to give them the chance of paying homage to their King. Every chief who would absent himself from the celebration without a reasonable explanation would be considered as a rebel, and he should be dealt with. This being the case due notice should be given to all the provincial chiefs of the time of the celebration. (H.A. [n.d.])

Komfo Anokye became recognized as an embodiment of Asante morals, knowledge, and custom. As such, he was also an embodied figure of all the polarities and contrasts of the Asante experience. He was immediately recognizable as a human/mythical repository of known values of culture and nature, order and disorder, human existence and

the wild. These contradictions were believed to be resolved within the historical personhood of Komfo Anokye. The continuity of the state was thereby assured. As noted in 1923 by an omanhene of an Asante village, this required recognition from worldly and supernatural authorities.

> After the conquering of Ntim the King of Denkyira, Osei Tutu the King of Asanti and the builder of Coomasie, by consent of his chiefs and elders, elected Komfo Anokye who prepared the war miracles against Ntim, and (placed him at the head of all Fetishes in Ashanti); consequent of which no other fetish was introduced into Ashanti without the consent and approval of Komfo Anokye. (RH: CHP, box no. 1)

The character of Komfo Anokye is secondary figurehead only to Osei Tutu is Asante history and mythology. However, unlike Osei Tutu, there is no mention in oral tradition or folklore of Komfo Anokye by name until the 1870s. As noted in chapter 3, this decade was a period of extreme transition in Asante history. It was the decade of both civil war and Anglo-Asante war, the period of transition from Kwaka Dua Panin to Mensa Bonsu who presented a reign of terror and oppression on the Asante, and it was the beginning of wide spread European market influences among all Asante. (Aidoo: 1975) During this decade, Asante state and society created strands of cultural disruption between the present and its historic past in an unprecedented manner.

Throughout the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries, the name of Komfo Anokye was unknown. The social order of law and morality remained enforceable and intact within the Asante state. In 1870s, this order was threatened from within Asante and from outside its boundaries. From within the ranks of at least one religious and reformist movement during this period, the person of Komfo Anokye arose as an embodied icon of the past, and of its moral and cultural certitudes.

One such movement which arose in 1879 was ɔdomaŋkama or abonsamkɔm. The title is derived from abonsam, or wizard/sorcerer/witch and akɔm. This was a witch finding movement that recognized Komfo Anokye as its mystical tutelary guide and legitimate predecessor. The movement has been described by Wilks as political (Wilks: 1976) and by Lewin as "a religious cult." (Lewin: 1978, p. 165) However, it focused attention on the physical body and on the attempts to cure the misgivings and corruptions of society. Such references are therefore ambiguous since they do not reveal if cult members perform witchcraft or if they attempt to stop others who are witches. Moreover, these brief glances are somewhat misleading since witch finding was more than just political or religious in content.

ɔdomaŋkama derived its name and ideological direction from the mythical figure Komfo Anokye. Leaders of the cult imagined themselves to be living embodiments of Asante history as patterned by Komfo Anokye. By attempting to (re)create a traditional Asante sense of morality and law, Komfo Anokye thus became a iconic repository of the past and it moral proclivities. Corruptions within the state, identified at the level of Asantehene, became fundamental axioms for witch finding in the nineteenth century. But methods of the cult were not entirely political. Their aims were not entirely revolutionary. In the name of their mystical predecessor Komfo Anokye, abonsamkɔm proceeded to replace the corrupt order with their own. Thus, their own myths included Komfo Anokye and his reappearances and endowing of power to members of the cult. The Basel missionary F. Ramseyer reported that in November, 1879, members of abonsamkɔm relayed the following message from Asante Akyem into Kwawu.

> Komfo Anokye and his colleagues, Komfo Odomangkama, Komfo Dabe, Komfo Owu, Komfo Kyerekye, send their greetings to the people of Okwau [Kwawu] and say: 'the tree which Komfo Anokye had felled [referring to the Anglo-Asante war of 1873-74] he has set upright again and has given life to it. It is he who may destroy a people or give life to them. He send word to the Okwau people that he intends to visit them. If they wish him to call on them, then he will come in twenty days. If they perhaps doubted his existence, they need only enquire of Atieyan and Buruku [abosom at Kwawu.] They should also know that the star which fell from heaven quite some time ago [the power of abosom] had been himself, Komfo Anokye. Another sign of his existence was that a hunter on a hike/hiking in the forest had met with fo [a partially white monkey] wearing gold sandals and sitting on a royal chair, who had sent the hunter with a message for Komfo Anokye. (BMA: D-1, reel 32, p. 159)

The story goes that the black, but partially white, monkey known as ɛfoɔ was with ɔdomaŋkama, the real creator, when he created the world. As a reward for his services, it is told that he requested that his name should be added to every other name. That is alleged origin of all Twi names with the ending "fo," especially most of the plural endings.

The story recounted to Ramseyer continues with a confrontation in the royal palace with the Asantehene Mensa Bonsu. It also includes the embodiment of the spirit of Komfo Anokye in leading akɔmfoɔ of ɔdomaŋkama.

> During my last stay at Knomase (almost all of last year) a new sect of fetish people appeared, who called themselves "Domangkama." The main priest called himself the "risen Komfo Anokye" and gave his priests and followers the names of the dead kings of Asante, namely Osei Tutu, Kwaku Dua, etc. by explaining that these (the Asante kings) had risen with him. These villains were able to delude a lot of Asantes through their deception and malice. And to win them over and make them believe that the dead kings were really alive again.
> Therefore they were not only very feared and treated with utmost respect, but also received so many presents that soon they were rich people, which made them very proud.
> But behold! God stopped their devilish ways. From the two royal envoys Asebi Antui and Busamurn Dwira, who you know well, and who stayed here for several days on their way to Accra (to the Governor,) I heard that the villains by and by became so impertinent, that one morning they entered the palace and at first they took all kinds of liberties, then suddenly one shot at the king without hitting him,

though. You know the Asantes. You know how they worship their king. Everybody threw himself onto the evil doers. Some were killed and others put in chains. The new Komfo Anokye was among them and is now in chains. I am afraid they will behead them all. I am told that the number of these priests with their followers was about 1,000.

It was probably one of these priests who sent the messengers to Okwan and I am very happy to hear that the Okwan people didn't listen to their deception. When I was in Kumase I talked seriously to the king about the behavior of these swindlers and asked him not to encourage them, because it seemed to me as if his Majesty looked at them favorably. Now the king and his counsel say that I was right when I warned the, that I spoke the truth.

The king can be happy that the bullet didn't hit him otherwise it would have been to late for him to learn what people these "Anokyers" are. He should learn a good lesson from this. It is, I believe, the first time it was tried to assassinate an Asante King. (BMA, D-1, reel 32, p. 161; translation of Karin Bitzer)

The movement was founded in unknown conditions by Okomfo Kwaku, who took his name from Komfo Anokye. His colleagues assumed the same name on themselves. They also claimed to be reincarnated figures from the Asante past such as Osei Tutu. The cult leader assumed the political and mystical mantle of the mythical Anokye figure. The movement established its own system of political and legal review by setting up cult leaders as judges within its own court of law. The cult also presumed to possess a line of mystical authority derived from Komfo Anokye. This authority situated the movement as unilaterally capable of the legitimate use of mystical powers originally given by abosom to humanity through Komfo Anokye. All of these moves were intentional repudiations of the office of asantehene in general and of Mensa Bonsu in particular. They represented a mocking denial of the person of Mensa Bonsu and in the name of reform, attempted to replace him as head of state.

When Mensa Bonsu learned of the cult, he sought to forge temporary, but false, alliances with its leaders. He even brought charges of witchcraft and sedition against

some so that he could sentence them with fines or with death. Confrontations at this level demonstrate the contest over political and moral authority of the Asanteman. For a short period, Mensa Bonsu appears to have endorsed the movement. This may have been as a result of its attempts to find and cleanse the land of witches. However, Bonsu ultimately could not abide the affront to his office and authority. As the leaders of ɔdomaŋkama established alternative courts of law, Bonsu took extreme measures. He exercised the total powers of the asantehene, and had most members of the cult executed. Others were exiled.

> Probably early in 1880 members of the movement entered Kumase and gave a display of musketry at Dwaberem, the Great Market, apparently to demonstrate their strength and militancy. Shortly afterwards, a group reentered the capital, and firing guns, forced their way into the palace. Taking "all sorts of liberties," one of their number tried to shoot Mensa Bonsu. Following the abortive assassination attempt, the Asantehene ordered a purge of the movement. (Wilks: 1975, p. 520)

ɔdomaŋkama presented an assault on the authority and person of the Asantehene and to state forms of civil power in the interest of the Asante nation by claiming sole and alternative legitimacy to the succession and power of Komfo Anokye. The movement was politically subversive and opportunistic — as realized in its challenge to the "tall tree which had fallen down." It was also mystically empowered with the ideology of legitimacy to Asante history -- in its pretext to the namesake of Komfo Anokye. This movement, like others which followed in the twentieth century, demonstrated the creativity of power in a diffuse way throughout other citizens of the state. The movement also demonstrates the use of power in both a political and mystical sense. In Africa, politics and religion are never far apart.

Prior to British rule, state power "subordinated and facilitated the operation

of other *recognized* forms of civil power in the interest of the Asante nation." (Akyeampong and Obeng: 1995, p. 21) Some forms of civil power, which were not in alliance with or recognized by the king, may have avoided royal legitimization and went underground. But all public expressions of power were allowed to continue only upon the recognition of the king. Ironically, initial permission of ɔdomaŋkama by Mensa Bonsu demonstrates the movement had state sanction to subdue and identify witches. But when the movement appeared to relinquish power of the king, it was seen as exceeding legitimate boundaries of anti-witchcraft cults. It became a form of political power. It could therefore be challenged and eliminated. Such methods involved death to all members of the cult.

An informant of Fortes provides an account of ɔdomaŋkama. Public confrontation over the legitimacy of access to the powers of the abosom was clearly an objective of the cult. This power is contested by ɔdomaŋkama who denounced the state and its historic practice. They asserted their beliefs even within the king's palace and in front of the most sacred and powerful of all Asante material symbols, the sika dwa kofi.

> In the history of Ashanti we hear of the purging of Ashanti of a fetish or witch-finding cult called "Abonsamfo" or "Bonsam." This cult had a considerable number of priests and priestesses, who had considerable influence and freedom of speech originally belonging to the most elect in the kingdom. They sallied forth on special days, prophesying, drumming, and sensing out witches and wizards on their way to Menhia...They propounded impossible doctrines. They robbed the laity of their wealth--their health too, for they produced so much fear into them by fostering a woeful superstition among them. Ho! It was intolerable. One day, they fell. They fell because they went into the "great house" where inebriated with the strong alcohol of unrestrained freedom they talked and talked until they talked nothing but fudge. The "Great Stool" of Ashanti had on that day been unveiled. Before "Asikua Kofi" [sika dwa kofi], the greatest of all the great powers of Ashanti, the "Abonsamfo" lost their power at once. (MF:ASSM, 1945d)

Moreover, ɔdomaŋkama denied and challenged the historic practice upon

which the Asante state was built. As a result, it is no surprise that the Asantehene Mensa Bonsu took drastic measures against performances of the cult by having the entire membership executed or imprisoned. Ironically, the cult members may have been more immediately powerful over Mensa Bonsu in death than in life. Mass executions of cult members also resulted in broad scale seizure of their individual wealth and property. Such abominable actions taken by the asantehene ultimately led to his dethroning in 1883. One eye witness to the drama stated, "This attitude of killing people and taking their effects roused an ill feeling within the breasts of the Ashantis and this made them revolt against [Nana Bonsu]." (Quoted in McCaskie: 1981, p. 133)

ɔdomaŋkama arose in a period of political instability. Events of the decade included the British military defeat of Asante and the burning of Kumase, the removal of Kofi Karikari from the throne, secession of Dwaben from the union, and the reign of terror of Mensa Bonsu. ɔdomaŋkama asserted a mystical and political resolution to the dilemmas of 1879 and afterward. Although there were likely others, it was the first witch finding movement on record in Asante.

The movement was a watershed in Asante history for three reasons. It challenged and redefined the state's political control over the affairs of all Asante. Second, it categorized the state as metaphorically ill. This categorization was extended to a multitude of others in a growing age of economic and religious transition. The cults then became a medium for providing mystical cures and medicines for these forms of illness. Third, it redefined and recreated the personhood of individual Asante in attempts to reshape the legitimacy of the Asante past. In all three ways, a creative power arose in Asante, apparently

for the first time in certain sectors. This use of power involved individual Asante in ways which were historically unprecedented. We will see in the remaining sections of this chapter how these three factors were developed in a plethora of witch finding movements which blossomed over the sixty years following 1879.

**4.4 What is a Witch? Who is a Witch?**

Before proceeding further with the rise of witch finding movements, it is necessary to briefly define what the Asante considered to be a witch. In Asante terms, witchcraft is bayi. The phrase is also sometimes pronounced and spelled bayie. The term bayi, however, is also considered to be what a witch possesses in order to do witchcraft. In this case, the female witch is known as obayifoo. The male witch is called bonsam. Thus, the term bayi describes either the witch as an individual, or his or her non-material power(s) which make the performance of witching possible.

There is no question that in former times witches were either murdered or were forced into suicide. Margaret Field wrote a note in 1956 stating that 20 years earlier she had walked through groves which had been used for both witch killing and for sacrifice to abosom.

> Yes, indeed, I think every abosom has a grove of trees. Mframa here has two groves, one called obrafoso where, I imagine, they killed the witches in the old days, and the other -- where they take the fetishes and put them under a tree during festivals, and kill sheep and what not — is called ayerɛ. (MJF: EMP)

Haskett writes of the Dente shrine, of which Asante royalty were constant patrons, that when two disputants brought charges before the shrine they were both required to swear an oath of allegiance or sometimes drink in recognition of the power of the shrine.

The oath had the power to afflict or kill the guilty person. The innocent person paid a thank offering for escaping with his life. But the guilty party was either fined, sold into slavery, died, or was ordered killed. His property was then retained by the priest in whose name he committed perjury. (Haskett: 1981, p. 83)

Asante witches were known to operate almost exclusively among matrilineal kindred. An informant told Fortes, "your wife can't injure you mystically, nor can your father's people. Now those maternal kin of yours may want to ruin you with their baye." (MF: ASSM, 1945a) Because adults are only capable of bayi, children are never suspected or accused. Witches are organized in hierarchical bands of ten or twenty known as fekuo. These band resemble the political order of pre colonial Asante. The bands assemble at night in tall trees found in the bush near village settlements. They fly or ride to these locations on owls, leopards or antelopes. There they devour and share portions of the human victims which they have caught and troubled. Witches are also known to devour ɔkra of a victim and thereby affect a person's ɔkrabea, or destiny. This will cause the victim to die or to become sick, barren, impotent, or mad.

Some witches have the capacity to change themselves into animals of the wild. These animals are identified as beasts with high or active sunsum. The witch will thus also possess this same active sunsum. Animals most likely to be identified as witches who have experienced shape shifting include the leopard and the antelope. The British explorer in the early twentieth century, A.W. Cardinall, thus had an Asante man in his employ who claimed, "his father and his uncle are leopards." This affiliation with the wild was why this man could "wander about alone at night unharmed." (Cardinall, 1927, pp. 211-212.)

Identification of witchcraft with the wild also categorizes witches as the "excluded other," (Munn: 1990, p. 3) since the wild is space resigned to non-humans and to potential danger. The distinction between village and forest was noted by both Cardinall and his assistant. To journey into the wild, he said, "is to enter into a land where disease and ill fortune will be one's lot, unless one guards most carefully against these magic sent misadventures." (Cardinall: 1927, p. 212)

Rank of the witch within the fekuo determines what portion of the victim is eaten. Human victims are most likely to be from within the abusua of the witch. Because witches consume blood, their hunger is for those which share their own kind of blood. They seek out victims within their own bogya or mogya. The powers of the witch, according to Rattray, are ineffective beyond their own clan. (Rattray: 1927, p. 28) The predominance of bayi among matrikin is illustrated from the mid nineteenth century when the maternal nephew of Kwaka Dua Panin attempted to usurp the throne by having his uncle killed through witchcraft.

> About this time Kewku Dua had trouble with his sister, Efua Spon, the Queen-Mother. Her son, Osei Kojo, was supposed to be scheming to oust Kweku Dua and to obtain the stool for himself. One of Osei Kojo's domestics informed the King that *his master had made a fetish to kill the King.*
> A dispute arose between them, and the Queen-Mother tried to shield her son, but Kweku Dua deposed her and appointed her daughter, Efua Kobi, as her successor. (Fuller: 1921, p. 87)

Witches devour the insides of an individual, cause pregnant women to abort the fetus, sterility in men and women, death and all manner of sickness, and general maladies to the body. Most commonly, however, witches do not partake of the actual flesh of a victim. Instead, they prefer to attack a person's ɔkra. Causal connections between soul and

body have already been discussed. Attacks by witches on the soul may thus cause severe physical and psychological illness, or death. Witches may also cause a harvest to fail or prevent individual members of the bogya from acquiring wealth. A witch may be the cause of accidents, business failures , and financial set back.

How one comes to be a witch or to possess bayi involves more than one option. One man told me that anyone may become a witch through "evil intent." In other words, he said, someone can be possessed of bayi as a result of hostile and "evil" feelings towards another. "Must the other person be of your own abusua," I asked. "No, it can be anyone!" Most reports of Asante witchcraft limit its efficacy to the matrikin of the witch. This pattern conforms to other West African societies, such as the Beng of the Ivory Coast. (Gottlieb: 1992, p. 60-62)

A different story was told to Fortes in 1945. His interview with a witch finder revealed that bayi is inherited through either the father or the mother. The witch finder's name was Mununkum.

> People become witches through birth. If both parents are witches the child inherit(s) the craft. A mother witch may die if her child is not a witch. Such a child is the child of God: "Onyame ba." It often happens that a mother witch may attempt to bewitch her child and may fall sick by doing so. She will go to an abosom and confess.
> "Abayifo y sunsum" Witches are spirits and the abosom is a spirit. If a witch does some evil thing the abosom catches him (her) in spirit. He becomes sick and requests that he should be sent to Mununkum. What a sick witch comes for confession I carry the abosom who may confirm or deny what the witch has said. If it is true that the person is a witch I give him (her) some medicine to bathe. He may stay in my village for two or three weeks until he becomes well again. Then he pays a fixed fee of 23. A witch knows he (she) is cured when he no longer finds himself flying about at night. (MF: ASSM: 1945g)

This same witch finder then identified yet another method for becoming a

witch. "A person may become a witch by applying to a witch who will give him medicine mixed with food to eat." He then explained how he was planning a trip to the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, to a village near Wa, in order to obtain a powerful medicine there which could counter the effects of bayi. These effects are ubiquitous, as demonstrated in the quantities of physical maladies and illness. The informant explained how illness and bayi are related, and how it is not possible to reveal all witches and cure all effects in their victims. "It is difficult to rid the world of all witches. They are many. The abosom can exterminate them, but the British Government is a hindrance. Some abosom and talismans have been confiscated and burned and the owners fined because the ɔkɔmfɔ used them as means for extortion." (MF: ASSM: 1945g)

Bayi is identified by the otherwise innocuous circumstances surrounding the victim. First, unlike audible cursing, witchcraft usually takes place in silence. There is no particular reason for a witch to attack a victim save it be the pure evil intent of the witch. Maladies are anticipated among people who may venture to far into the wild. But within the space of culture, illness and other telltale signs are often considered indications of bayi. Second, bayi is sometimes practiced by persons without their awareness. Examples below show how confessions of bayi or of witch identity are common place within witch cleansing cults. Witches may not be liberated from their identity as witch until they disclose before the shrine what Shakespeare referred to as, "a deed without a name."

Female witches attack and kill their own children. Male witches are sometimes known to kill their own sisters. Both of these immediately appear as direct threats to the matrilineage, the fundamental piece of fabric in Asante social life. Most of

those who confess to witchcraft are women. Without revealing his source of information, McLeod notes that women outnumbered men seven to one in confessing witchcraft. (McLeod: 1975, p. 111)

This tendency to accuse women or implicate women as a having greater potential for witchcraft supports both data given by Apter for Atinga witchcraft in Yoruba (Apter: 1993), and Austin's general theory of witchcraft as gender linked in both Europe and Africa (Austin: 1993.) In these cases, women betray their own gender by devouring their children and by polluting or corrupting sex linked body parts. Witching qualities are thus often stored within their bellies or their vagina. One woman giving testimony at a British witch finding tribunal in 1930 confessed that, "witchcraft is a snake (okyimbir) [which] lies on my breast, in my eyes and in my private." (NAG: A.D.M., 266/61) They are also stored in a women's waist beads which support a genitalia covering for women, and which is linked with reproduction. "My waist beads are also okyimbir as well as my hairs. We eat human flesh on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays and eat in farms on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. On Sundays we rest." This form of "eating" was likely the mystical consumption of the soul of the victim. Through eating the soul, the witch caused bodily illness or death. By thus "eating" reproductive body parts, witches destroy the abilities of persons to reproduce members of a lineage. By attacking women and by women performing witchcraft, Asante witches undermine the most fundamental unit of society: the matrilineage and the matrilineal transmission of bogya. Data below will demonstrate Asante examples of witchcraft as gender related.

Witches are capable of flight, often at night time. Witches possess lumps and

other physical qualities which reveal their identity as witches. They are also detectable to witch finders and to all members of witch finding cults who have been anointed for the visible detection of witches. A witch may also walk upside down, and will cavort naked in public.

Asante bayi is overwhelmingly concerned with the body. Witches are perpetrators of illness and of a wide variety of bodily maladies. A prime concern of the witch is to devour some portion of the body, and to devour the blood. The blood is removed from the body by sucking. A witch patrols a village at night, and will attack a victim by placing its buttocks against the hut from the outside. Each witch carries its own suman, and this is given mystical powers by mmoatia, as noted above. The suman makes a connection with an individual asleep in the hut, and thereby is able to drain or suck the blood of the victim. After such an attack, the victim may die or may awake in the morning with some sort of illness.

All witches have consort with sasabonsam and with mmoatia within the forest. According to Rattray's informant, a famous witch finder, bayi originated within the Aduana clan, "who came from the ground." (Rattray: 1927, p. 30) From the same source we learn that witches in pre-colonial times were killed after being discovered. Their blood was never shed. They were always killed by strangulation. However, after the imposition of British law and penalties for homicide, this practice was modified. Thereafter, witches could be administered by the medicines of a witch finder. Their powers could thus be rendered ineffective. In order to make this disabling process work, the witch confessed their identity, sometimes drank medicine, and often offered a sheep or a fowl as a sacrifice. They also paid

the witch finder for their services.

An inquisition following the suicide of one Kpeli in 1924, who was suspected of witchcraft, shows how the death was the expected result of witching. The testimony is given by the man who found the body.

> My name is Adamah. I am a fisherman. I live at Accra. I knew one Kepli. Kpeli is dead. She died four weeks ago today. I saw how Kpeli died. I saw that she hung herself in her own room. I received a report from Tettey Fio that Ashiammah's mother Abbah was quarreling with the deceased. Tettey Fio fold me that Abbah had accused the deceased Kpeli of killing Ashiammah by witchcraft. I went to the house of the deceased with Tettey Fio. We looked for Kpeli but could not find her. The door was locked. We looked through the keyhole. We could see the key on the other side of the door. We knocked at the door and called the deceased. We received no answer. I therefore fetched a barrel and stood on the roof. I saw Kpeli, the deceased hanging with a rope round her neck. One end of the rope was tied round a beam, the other round deceased's neck. Deceased was dead. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

A similar testimony is given in 1933 by a woman whose brother also ended his own life after discovering through the Kunde shrine that he had performed bayi on members of his own family. This story is atypical, however, in regards to the mode of death. The National Archives of Ghana contains dozens of testimonials of witches who have ended their lives by hanging. Fewer had taken poison — sometimes administered by the shrine ɔkɔmfɔ — to end their lives. There is only one example of a witch ending his life by self inflicted burns.

> My name is Yaw Abra, farmer of Bepong. I know one Kwame Asabre. He was my brother, by the same mother. He is now dead. Last Saturday I went to Asakraka with the deceased to consult the Kunde Fetish. The family had been suffering an undue amount of trouble in death and debt. After we had consulted the fetish Asabre confessed that he was the cause of the trouble in the family. He mentioned the name of five members of the family whom he had killed by witchcraft. He did not say by what means he had used his supernatural powers. He killed 33 fowls and all had fallen forwards; that is a bad sign so after he had killed these 33, he admitted having abused supernatural powers...By the time Asabre confessed it was dusk, so the priest

> told us to return on Saturday. I went to remind the deceased and he said he had sent the sheep to Asakraka to appease the Kunde Fetish and that he was trying to find a loan to enable him to appear before the Kyirenya Fetish...Then I left him to see a friend and when I was in my friend's house, second witness came and told me that deceased had burned himself.
> There are some members of the family who are barren and the deceased admitted that he was responsible for this. He said this when he went to the Kunde Fetish. I do not know how he made these people barren; he works in the darkness when I am asleep. Before the Kunde Fetish, deceased said he was going to kill me among others.
> On conclusion, the priest would give him a kola nut which he would eat as a sign that he intended to give up his evil ways. If he had returned to the abuse of his supernatural powers, the fetishes would kill him. Any person can abuse supernatural powers. Everybody is endowed with these powers.
> Before he went he was the only one who knew he was acting evil. I do not know if it was the fetish that killed him. Although I knew deceased was a witch, I was very grieved at his death. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

Responses to misfortunes such as illness and death in this manner did not provide evidence of communal inabilities to encounter the evil effects of bayi. Nor did they signal a personal apathetic acceptance of suffering. Rather, they were seen as active responses to recognized unfortunate aspects of human life. Pain, illness, death, and all manner of suffering were considered not as anomalies of life but as basic features of embodied existence. Affliction and disease, including mental illness, were considered as part of a fluid Asante cosmology which brought human life within repetitive proximity to its nemesis, the wild. Unfortunate events and illness were considered as natural results of this contact. The body was, in turn, viewed as one form of conveyance of this dialogue. Whereas it has been well documented in African society and history that illness and disease are means of apprehending ruptures and discord within social relations, it may be stated that in Asante history illness was also considered as a manifestation of nature within human life. This reality was true in pre-colonial Asante history; and it continued, although modified, into

the British era. But instead of viewing illness as a kind of cosmic justice which lacked human or supernatural agency, Asante viewed assault on the body as replete with human and mystical character. Basic to action and experience at this level was the creativity of power, and human capacities to recreate personhood. This theme shapes this thesis. It is now necessary to provide more historic detail of the witch finding movements within the nascent colonial regime.

**4.5 Aberewa and Hwe Me So: "Legitimate Human Aspirations"**

Prophecies, medicines, law, and administrative procedures found within the ɔdomaŋkama movement in 1879 may all be considered as illustrative of Asante society in general during the final decades of the nineteenth century. There is little documentation regarding ɔdomaŋkama or Aberewa, the first witch finding cult to be documented after colonial rule. However, documents by Ramseyer and others demonstrate both an attempt at reform of the asantehene and expressions of social unrest. Beginning with Kwaka Dua Panin on through to the times of Mensa Bonsu, Asante society experienced ruthlessness, greed, oppression and terror at the hands of the king. Moreover, the widened expansion of capitalist enterprises and European missions in 1870 contributed to the dismantling of traditional state and society in pre-colonial Asante. As noted in chapter 3, new ventures in trade were being exploited by a rising elite class known as akonkofo, or "modern gentlemen," with its new emphasis on body symbolism, on commodities and on accumulation. These ventures generated capital and wealth among all levels of Asante. Wealth and the power of political economy were rapidly crossing over from the privilege of royalty and the upper classes to the entire population. Opportunities in new markets and the resulting flow of cash made it

possible for these classes to afford new commodities and to purchase new kinds of goods and services. One such service was the newly created witch finding movement known as Aberewa.

Expansion of money and commodities among the poor and among slaves also threatened the power of the traditional state's ability to control income and the flow of wealth. The power of the state was thereby vastly limited. It was rumored at this time that "common men and slaves are ruling the country." (Quoted in McCaskie: 1981, p. 134) This sentiment stood the hierarchy of the pre-colonial state on its head. This period was also wracked by civil war and by the submission of Prempeh I to the British in 1897, thus completing the annexation of Asante. With this succession came the end of odwira, or the ritual control over Asante production and reproduction, health and illness, the body, and all elements which defined the Asante past, present and future. In sum, "there existed in early colonial Asante a widespread sentiment that society no longer "worked" as it once had done, and that in its present uncertainty it was somehow unreliable, and ultimately threatening." (McCaskie: 1981, p. 134)

It was during this period, for example, that we first read of court cases where Asante defendants were accused and convicted of trying to steal the sika dwa kofi, the very sunsum of the Asanteman. Without the authority and power of the state, as recognized in odwira and within the sika dwa kofi, it was doubtful that the ever encroaching faculties of the wild could be controlled. Mystical and political means for effecting such controls which had been relied upon in the past were now virtually eliminated. This encroachment of disordering nature was most commonly realized at the level of the individual, specifically

within individual embodied experience. We will thus see how the body became a medium of diversity and of assault in colonial Asante. It was a time in which illness and disease were rampant in epidemic proportions. In the early colonial period, Asante personhood and identity assumed new social character. It is within this context of ambiguity and creativity that the witch finding cults of colonial Asante must be placed

Two of the earliest witch finding movements of the colonial period were Aberewa, which meant "The Old Woman," and Hwe me so, or "watch over me.". The cults appeared in 1906 and 1922 respectively. A detailed description of both cults was given by Police Commissioner C. Thomas in 1922. The letter was written to a colleague in the city of Cape Coast where several witch finding movements were also flourishing. Thomas had directly witnessed more than a dozen shrines in Bekwai near Kumase, and was also knowledgeable of various accusations and confessions of witchcraft made before the witch finding shrines. He stated, "I do not think you require me to furnish you with a list of places where shrines are set up at this stage, but I know of fifteen." At least one of these shrines was in Kwanyako, which was photographed and which Thomas included in his letter. Thomas then makes comparisons between Hwe me so and Aberewa based on the physical appearance of the shrine and its environ. "Comparing the details between the list of symbols, etc. of the Abrewa fetish destroyed in 1908, and this Hwemsu, there appears little difference. I refer you to the drums, urns, calabashes and the idol like figures, also the knives." He then confesses, "during my investigations I heard the most surprising stories, but I have kept strictly in this report to absolutely corroborated information."

Apparently one of the stories which received such verification involved a

pregnant woman whose witchcraft and related nefarious deeds were disclosed by the shrine as a result of her drinking the medicine administered by shrine akɔmfoɔ. The shrine which she approached was Hwe me so, located in the Nsuaem District. No village or local community is mentioned. Because of the seriousness of the case, the matter eventually wound up in the Court of the colonial Magistrate in 1922.

> The police are continually hearing of deaths in the Nsuaem district, which are attributed to the drinking of this fetish medicine, but in all cases, proof is impossible to obtain. Recently at Nsuaem, a woman in the last stage of pregnancy complained that she could not deliver as the fetish "had caught her." She made a statement purporting to be a confession that she herself had caused the death of children and in particular, two of a father who was present. She said she had done it by witchcraft. The father was so enraged that he slapped her face. Bleeding immediately started, and the woman died in a matter of minutes. Of course the man was charged in the Magistrate's Court. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

Earlier in the letter, Thomas describes similarities in performance and spatial arrangements of the two cults. "There is, no doubt, little in the foregoing which suggests anything very harmful, at the same time it shows how much akin this fetish is to Aberewa." This was a concern since, at the time in 1922, Aberewa had already been suppressed by the British in a formal Order in Council written by Governor Guggisberg fourteen years earlier. Any similarities in appearance, performance, and uses of medicines inclined the administration to believe that their legal interventions had not been entirely successful.

Perhaps the similarities were most striking in the mystical control of the body. Mystical healing and the ability to treat illness and to assist in the curing of diseases were common features of all witch finding cults during the colonial period. Illness in general was viewed as physical symptoms of mystically caused agents. This observation was noted by Sir Francis Fuller in his treatise on Asante in 1921.

> Those who drank "Abirewa" considered themselves immune from evil influences and assured of good health and prosperity so long as certain laws were not transgressed. But the secret of success lay in the powers arrogated to themselves by the priests of the cult, who alleged that with the aid of the fetish they could discover "witches." Witchcraft has always played an all important part in the lives of these natives, who believe that the untoward circumstances of life are attributable to malign spirits. (Fuller: 1921, p. 221-222)

These agents were considered within the wider picture of Asante polarities between the realm of human culture and the domain of the wild. Thomas continued his observations of the shrine. "I am told by several it [hwe me so] claims to drive away evil spirits generally, that is anything from a pain in the stomach to cocoa blight, and is supposed to induce some wonderful amicable spirit between all worshipers. By this medicine the priest also professes to cause barren women to conceive; in fact, one woman witness informed me that she had to thank him for her child." Thomas saw the process as one of patient and doctor involved in a charade of extortion. "The fetish priest would trade on this by playing on the superstitions of the individual, obtain a confession together with a suitable penance and then cleanse the offender's soul with another dose of medicine." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

The appearance of Abirewa in 1906 was the first of its kind on record in Asante since the ɔdomaŋkama in 1879. It is unlikely that no other cults appeared during this period of seventeen years. The popularity of Abirewa may be correlated with a significant aspect of British domination of Asante: the decline of the Asante political hierarchy and kingship. Before the 1874 sack of Kumase and the 1896 annexation of the state, power was legitimized at the local level by chiefs and ultimately by the king for the entire nation. This restriction included authority over mystical powers of akɔmfoɔ, and over the abilities of

commoners to import foreign creeds, medicines and suman into Asante. The free movement of medicine vendors was also restricted. After 1896, Asante state control of these medicinal and religious features was in great decline. Major political figures, including the king himself, were imprisoned or exiled. As replacements, the British government set up regional commanders who carried out the written laws of the Governor in Accra. The spread of Abirewa and other cults flourished among those who did not hold office, but who "seized the new opportunities for personal initiative" (McLeod: 1975, p. 110) and for power. (Parkin: 1968)

Earth shrines such as Dente and other oracles had been consulted by Asante royalty for well over 100 years. They were mostly successful in times of war; but the shrines were also used for defending against witches. Through the shrines, state authority drove the power of witches and the wild underground. However, as state power weakened and became non-existent, both witchcraft and the power to expose and defeat witches reasserted themselves in strikingly new forms. Witch catching shrines had always remained outside the influence, control, and power of commoners. After 1896, the powers and methods of shrines were no longer the property of the state. Rather, they soon fell within a wider public domain and became the concerns of men of influence of an economic sort. Lack of real political authority by Asante and the disregard (legalization) of witchcraft under colonial rule both contributed to the rise and rapid popularity of Abirewa in early colonialism.

Until the arrest of the Asantehene in 1896, the Asante king was regarded as "all-powerful and all-conquering." From the age of Osei Tutu and Akomfo Anokye, the Sika dwa kofi was considered invincible because of its magical properties. As a result, the Asante

kingdom was considered incapable of defeat. Nor could the occupant of the Sika dwa kofi be arrested and subjected. For this to happen would be sacrilege.

But the British occupation of Asante and the arrest of the king resulted in the demythologizing of the Stool's invincibility. Respect and honor of the Asantehene, already weakened through the nineteenth century, was nearly evaporated. "Unquestioning allegiance of his own subjects also began to flop and ebb." (Obeng: 1988, p. 64) The decline and subjugation of the state resulted in recreated forms of power and identity. Among these forms were witch finding movements focusing on their magical abilities to identify witches and heal witchcraft victims.

The fame of Abirewa to catch witches, and its potential for money making, spurred the consciousness of many Asante. By 1908, many Asante were aware of the new economic horizons. Many wished to blend nascent financial opportunities with traditional forms of medicines. As the British forced Abirewa into suppression, other shrines were already rising to take its place. In 1956, Field wrote to Eva Meyerowitz concerning the proliferation of fetish medicine shrines. "I have seen — since 1929 — a sufficient number of these shrines to realize now that they spring up almost in a night, like tropical vegetation, after the first rain & they wither away almost as swiftly when another becomes fashionable." (Field: EMP)

During the first years of witch finding, those who administered ritual and medicine to the cult adherents appeared to pay little mind to the reactions of shock and dismay exhibited by some British administration and particularly by Methodist and Presbyterian clergy. Songs, dances, offering of medicine including "drinking fetish," and

the shrines themselves were openly observed by many colonial officials. Their views on such practices differed widely. However, the descriptions given provide a unique insight into cult restrictions and the personal experiences of cult members. District Commissioner J.A. Jones claims that Hwe me so, "came directly from the Akim Kotoku Division," and "spread rapidly through the district." Although Jones did not speculate on the dates of its migration, the shrine was unknown in Asante before 1922. Jones also made personal eye witness descriptions of cult shrines in several villages. "The principal shrines known to me being at Asamangkoso, Apiramang, Panno and a village near Apapam. Further itinerant apostles of the fetish roam throughout the district preaching its great powers and endeavoring to persuade the people to pay for the cost of a shrine." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243) Jones provided the added disclosure that "aberewa was similar in appearance and structure to that of hwe me so but whereas that of the former was built on the outskirts of the town, that of the latter is invariably situated in the most central part."

Beginning dates and places of origin of Aberewa are unclear. Like many other cults of the time, a strong influence from regions outside Asante appear to have migrated across ethnic and national boundaries. Aberewa has been traced to the Abron kingdom of Gyaman in what is currently the Ivory Coast. The method of conveyance was within trade routes which linked Asante, Techiman, and other inland regions with northern peoples and with coastal communities. These routes had existed for centuries. The goods necessary to begin a shrine were the suman, a magical charm or talisman, and any other magical piece(s) which may be part of the idiosyncratic craft of a local practitioner. Ownership of these relics sometimes entitled its possessor to hold the power to practice

healing and witch finding. At other times, these powers were conveyed within lineages lines. One ɔkɔmfɔ I spoke with near Cape Coast told me he had come from Wa, and that his powers were conferred upon him through his father's lineage. It should also be recounted that trade with northern lands brought Asante into contact with religious relics and concepts for centuries. Use of shrines and other mystical sources by Asante political elite became established practices, particularly at times of tension such as witchcraft or war.

One notable example was the consultation made of the Dente shrine by the Asantehene Osei Bonsu during the Gyaman war of 1819 mentioned in chapter 2. (Maier: 1983: p. 38) Asante also consulted the Dente shrine regularly, however, at times of disease, for family conflicts, legal troubles, and for prospective wealth. However, Maier also notes that the Dente shrine was never consulted for purposes of witch findings or the administration of cult oaths on a "mass level." (Weaver: 1975, p. 76) Consultations at the Dente shrine were limited to political elite of Asante and other states of West Africa.

Another example, provided by Ramseyer and Kuhne, shows how the Asantehene Kofi Kokari utilized Ewe medicine specialists captured in previous military endeavors as consultants during the Anglo-Asante war of 1873-1874. The Ewe priests were commissioned by the king on January 25, 1873 to be advised by war oracles in the marketplace of Kumase. The priests prophesied that Akyem, Assin, Denkyira and Wassa would be recaptured by the king, and that he would defeat the white men. For their welcome consultation, the king supplied them with 81 pounds sterling, 20 sheep, 20 goats, 20 loads of salt, 70 bottles of rum, and 50 Krepi war captives with a promise of 1,000 more if their abosom would secure such a victory for the Asantehene. (Ramseyer and Kuhne: 1875, p.

208-209.) During war time, the shrines became portable. They were carried into the field of battle as a means of protection. Ellis notes that the British backed Fante soldiers were defeated in battle by the Asante in 1874. His informants explained that the defeat was the result of the Asante carrying a more powerful war abosom with them to the coast. (Ellis: 1887, p. 50-51.)

Aberewa appears to have taken hold in Asante at least by 1907 in the town of Edweso. From there it split in two directions. It moved north to Mampon villages, and south to the area of Lake Bosomtwe. (McCaskie: 1981, p. 139) The shrine appears to have been successfully suppressed by the British by 1908. Popularity of the cult created concerns of rebellion and threats of murder among the British. Sedition and conspiracy were linked with the mutilation of corpses of witchcraft victims. According to Fuller, bodies of witches "were buried in shallow graves strewn with broken bottles, with most degrading formalities." (Fuller: 1921, p. 222) On August 6, 1908, the cult was officially banned. As a popular movement, the cult was finished. But it continued on in a segmented and clandestine manner until eventually disappearing from any noticeable public gaze. Scrutiny leveled more than a decade later at participants of Hwe me so, however, indicates the suspicion and implication that this cult had simply reformed the contents of Aberewa under another name. For example, in 1921 the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast Colony heard a case against three Asante men in which the three "did celebrate the rite ceremony and worship of the Fetish known as Aberewa." Four days later, the Court heard a similar case against Afua Fofie and some of her associates: "all young girls, some apparently only about seven years old." In the latter case, leave was granted and the charges were dismissed. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/452)

Both Aberewa and Hwe me so were viewed with much criticism by Asante elite and by the British. Some local Asante officials considered the cults as threats to their own power. In this manner, Aberewa had strong similarities to ɔdomankama, and its political and mythical content. Indeed, the cults assumed adaptive proportions to both society and history. Aberewa became progressive in response to wealth found in British enterprises. Cult leaders became involved in influence peddling and in the selling of medicines. Growing numbers of the population were able to purchase medicine and healing with cash and with commodities. This is because the expanding base of wealth financially benefitted larger portions of people. Clearly this market for medicine and healing was present; and the resulting trade in this enterprise provided a profitable occupation for cult leaders.

Aberewa was also conservative in regards to Asante culture. Similar to ɔdomaŋkama, this cult of the colonial period identified the political calamity of pre-colonial Asante as a reason for its existence. Yaw Awua, the unknown man who is credited with initiating the cult, insisted that followers devote their political loyalty to cult leaders rather than to Asante officeholders. The existing Asante authorities were considered as puppets of the British and unworthy of their allegiance. In this sense, Aberewa attempted a reversal of history. However, it also denied history in its pursuit to eradicate all forms of political hierarchy, whether Asante or British. History was also fragmented by Aberewa as it was besieged with a myriad of requests for individual needs and desires. Many of these petitions pertained to healing; but others dealt specifically in the pursuit of wealth and commodities. Still other consultations were deeply personal and private, involving confession,

commitment, rededication or purging. As one petitioner to the government put it in 1922, "legitimate human aspirations and other forms of conation in human beings cannot but lead to reactions some of which have distinctly religious aspects." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243) Aberewa thus became an accessible source of power for individual creativity of power in the reconstruction of history and meaning in the early twentieth century.

One premise of this thesis is that power in Asante originated in a spiritual and cosmological realm. The source of power was Onyame, not the king. Political authority in no way monopolized access to power. However, the state did legitimize the public exercise of power. After the king was exiled, power could no longer be restricted by a political center. Instead, power was creatively manipulated in diverse sectors of Asante. Capacities and creativity of power by commoners during this period in Asante history may be witnessed in the events described in a document which recorded the transactions of a meeting in October, 1921.

At attendance were the Provincial Commissioner H.E.G. Bartlett and 25 omanhene, or village leaders, from southern Asante areas. Bartlett began the meeting by trying to trace connections between contemporary cult shrines of 1921 and that of Aberewa which was officially suppressed in 1908. "There was a fetish several years ago called Aberewa, which caused a good deal of unrest in the country; and today there is a fetish which is causing a great concern. I understand this fetish is practiced in near villages and I want to hear all about it." One of the chiefs present then offered a summary of the power of the shrine and disclosed its identity.

The black man knows his medicine, and it protects his people. I heard that someone

> was making a medicine, and that it was preventing witchcraft. Infant mortality has been high. A woman might have one child, or two, and no more...If a man wants to put another man in fetish and harm him this fetish will make the man come forward and confess. If a man hates another man, and wishes to poison him, if the man whom he wishes to poison has this fetish, it will make the miscreant come forward and confess. The man has to sacrifice a sheep, and is washed with the Fetish water. They are allowed to go free after they have used the Fetish water. All the evil spirit is washed away. If a man kills another with a cutlass or gun he is, of course, reported to the government. If a man kills by evil practices of witchcraft he is dealt with by this Fetish and the medicine prevents the man from doing wrong again, and is known by all. Having killed one man, he is washed and made clean by this Fetish. A barren woman is washed with Fetish [and] gives birth to many children. The Fetish was introduced to prevent people doing evil deeds. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

The omanhene then explained how witch finding rituals centered on the shrine and on the akɔmfoɔ who were in the middle of the participants as they surrounded the shrine. The ritual began with drumming and singing of all in the circle. In Aberewa, a fowl was sacrificed in order to divine the harm done. At a point when the shrine is considered efficacious, medicine was administered to those who believe on its powers. Medicines were intended to heal both the soul and the body. Medicine oaths and ordeal were meant to force a person into confessing the wrongs he or she had committed or to reveal their identity as a witch.

One man confessed his intention to kill another man with the power of witchcraft; but the medicine forced a confession and restrained his purposes. The witch was then instructed to pay the akɔmfoɔ a small fee of cash and perhaps a chicken or goat. The omanhene then offered a description of how the shrine had power to project illness on those who denied it, and withdraw illness on those who sustained it. Proof of the shrines power to force confession, thus disclosing the identity of the witch, is given in a list of names of self confessed witches. Those who have done witchcraft, or who have harmed others with the

powers of a witch, may atone for their wrongs. They must confess, swear to do no such wrong again, "drink fetish" in order to have the protection of the shrine, sacrifice, and pay an established amount in cash. If these proscriptions are not followed precisely, the result may be illness. These rules are contained in the description given by the omanhene.

> The medicine will make a man confess when he comes in contact with anyone who has taken the medicine, and when he wishes to practice evil, that he wishes to do evil to this man and that he has killed people. Ambah Ampofuah, Yaw Ankam, Atta Akosuah, Abina Ahinoah, Yaw Akrah have all confessed to killing people. Also Yaah Okrah. They all confessed to killing by witchcraft at Nsuaem. The medicine will punish those who offend the Fetish, and will make the men confess. If a man offends it, and doesn't confess it will punish him by sickness, not by death, for 3 days to 8 days. If the man confesses, the man knows that he has the sickness of the Fetish. If the man does not confess, no one can tell. I have never heard of a man dying, who had not confessed. The Fetish does not make people ill for more than 8 days. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

Testimony on Aberewa continued by another chief who claimed that he acquired the fetish "for the good of the town." In this example, the chief controlled the fetish. He provided whiskey for the performances each Friday and Sunday between 6 a.m. and 11 a.m. "A lot of people attend." As a result of the fetish, "the barren women are giving forth now." A description of the ritual was given, including more descriptions of individuals who drank fetish and confessed their witchcraft.

> The priests dance. The women sing, so I hear. I do not go to the celebrations myself, some of my Elders look after it. Drums beat and there are songs. If a man wishes to do evil against another who has been purified by water, he comes up and confesses. Three women have confessed to killing others. The killing took place several years before the introduction of the Fetish. They pay 2 which I send the Omanhene and I get myself. The priests are in attendance night and day.
> A man killed someone with a cutlass or gun, and came and confessed to the Fetish, I should not give him the medicine. It is only when he has killed him by witchcraft that he is anointed.
> If a man wishes to be anointed with the medicine, before he is, he cuts a fowl in half, and the Priest declares by the color of the blood whether he is good or bad. If the

> blood is black the Priest tells him that he has done something bad, and the man confesses. Aberewa has a kola nut cut in half instead of a chicken. If a man takes the medicine and then does something wrong the medicine catches the man, and makes him sick. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

The document then concludes with the confessions of homicide and other deeds of witchcraft. The man and woman who offer confession speak of murder only within their own family or lineage. They both speak of the fetish as being instrumental in publicly disclosing their killings, and in its ability to cure their ills. The first confession is given by Yaw Krah.

> I live at Ahyinam. I am a cocoa farmer. I am a witch. I took the medicine to get rid of this devil in me. I killed sometime ago my own sister Ekuah Mansah. I was ill, and was brought to Nsuaem, and taken to the Fetish. Fowls were killed; one fowl was refused. Because I had not confessed, I was taken to Anyinam where I confessed that I was about to kill my uncle. I took the medicine and have been cured of my devil. I was very ill before seeing the Fetish, and nearly died. I killed my sister by taking the Spirit out of her. I did not actually touch the body nor did I poison her. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

The record then stated that Yaw Krah appeared "dazed and half witted." The second confession was offered by a woman with the last name of Ampofuah; her first name is not given. She is described as "a woman of weak intellect, and half witted."

> I live at Nsuaem. I killed my sister during the influenza epidemic. I killed her by witchcraft. I like her but she wrong me. I confessed to the Omanhene's fetish. I received medicine and I was cured. It took a year before I confessed after the washing. I wished to instill my devil into my daughter and the Fetish caught me and made me confess. I still adhere to the fact that I killed my sister. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

Origins of the Hwe me so ("watch over me") and other shrines are a matter of debate. McCaskie cites data taken from the Charles Harper papers, Rhodes House, and from the National Archives of Ghana at Kumase. These data construct an origin which

brings Hwe me so into Asante in 1920 from southern regions. This southern direction is supported by one document I found in the National Archives in Cape Coast. "Originating in Chamah, the fetish appears to have appealed to the susceptible minds of the Kotokus, and with its headquarters first at the small village of Nkwaten and subsequently at Nsuaem spread rapidly through the whole of the Division." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/452)

Southern origin of Hwe me so is uncharacteristic, as many of the shrines which did not originate in Asante were brought from Ivory Coast or from the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. Coastal origins for healing shrines were not entirely unheard of, however. One shrine known as Afirum was imported to Asante and Akwapim from Fante in 1912. The report states the fetish consisted of a brass bowl in which a few lumps of gold "and other matter" were rolled into a ball. This lump included pieces of tails from tigers, wolves and buffalo. "The meaning of Afirum is Health Searching and its other name is Agye Aboo interpreted as Bullet Defender. It has the reputation of curing disease...The Fetish originally came from Asamangkasi in Fanti and was brought to Aburi after a war that took place 100 years ago." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/430)

From the beginning, Hwe me so was a money making proposition. It was sold by a single entrepreneur to other individuals in a wide geographic distribution throughout Asante. Those who purchased the fetish were able to recover their initial expenses by exclusively selling its healing powers to persons of their own villages. In this manner the sale and use of Hwe me so resembled a conglomerate or a franchise. This claim is supported by evidence with the National Archives. One observation made in August, 1922 of Hwe me so notes the astounding financial management and success of the shrine.

> The creator of this Fetish is rumored to be in Ashanti at the moment. Apparently, as most of the villagers in western Akim have now been supplied with shrines at a cost of some 400 each, he has done very well out of it. Further he goes on tour to the various shrines examining the evil smelling mixture which serves as the medicine and then pronounces it to be losing its strength. This he replenishes at a cost of about 80 a time. The money this man has made out of the credulity of the people must be enormous. At Nkwaten I learn he has prevailed on the villagers to build him a large house and compound...Apart from the continual drain on the pockets of the people, in my opinion the worst features of this nuisance are its supposed powers of making evil doers confess their sins and of washing away their guilt. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

The standard fee for curing was nine pounds sterling, some whiskey and either a sheep or assorted food items. Meanwhile, the "purchase price" of a Tigare shrine in 1945 was 37 pounds sterling. (MF: ASSM, 1945c). At this rate, the originator of Hwe me so, Kwabena Nzema, was able to profit between 2,000 and 3,000 pounds sterling for his efforts in just two years. By comparison, the average skilled worker at the time made about 200 sterling in a two year period.

My own data gathered in the National Archives of Ghana does not agree with McCaskie concerning the origins of Hwe me so. One document from August 17th, 1922 suggests that the shrine was purchased locally by a chief from an Asante named Kobina Nyankumagu. The latter bought the shrine in the Northern Territories where he was a permanent resident. "The fetish consists of a large ball of medicine (herbs) and he paid the sum of 40 pounds for it. The fetish is now kept in a small house specially built for it on the side of the main road before reaching Foso from Cape Coast."

Another document from the same file suggests that, "the fetish Fwe-me-so [sic] (guard or protect me) was founded at Akoroso, Western Province, as a safeguard against opposition witchcraft and injurious or poisonous medicines. The mixture compounded as

medicine is made up of medicinal herbs -- condensed milk -- and as the popularity of the fetish extends a good deal of alcohol finds its way into the melting pot." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

Fortes notes two reasons why Asante sought out the power of witch finding shrines from the northern territories of the Gold Coast. First, shrines within Asante "fail to satisfy one fundamental need, that of forgiveness after confession and paying of a small "sum" to pacify the fetish." Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, "the indigenous fetishes have not power of "catching" witches, and "catching" adulterers and thieves." (MF: ASSM, 1945c) Douglas has also noted that Lele witch and sorcerer controlling "cults originated in other parts" beyond the Kasai region. (Douglas: 1963, p. 244)

Importation of shrines and talismans from Muslim regions of West Africa into Asante was noted by Bowdich in the early eighteenth century.

> The most surprising superstition of the Ashantees, is their confidence in the fetishes they purchase so extravagantly from the Moors, believing firmly that they make them invulnerable and invincible in war, paralyze the hand of the enemy, shiver their weapons, divert the course of balls, render both sexes prolific, and avert all evils but sickness, (which they can only assuage,) and natural death. (Bowdich: 1966, p. 271)

Goody adds that the influence of Muslims in the political economy of Kumase in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, (Wilks: 1980) supports the notion that trade in goods also sustained trade in religious and medicinal relics. Moreover, the importation of religious icons may be due to their effectiveness, and their effectiveness was "stimulated by their actual control of a superior technique of human communication, namely, that of writing." (Goody: 1968: 203) Finally, Field notes that "all the new shrines from the Northern Territories: Tigare, Nana Tongo, Senya Kupo, etc. bring a collection of Northern Territory

spears and tunics. I don't know that they are of Moslem origin, but I daresay they might be." (MJF: EMP)

As shrines and their medicines were imported from Ivory Coast and from the Northern Territories, many of them resumed a close association with the earth. Earth shrines were an essential part of religion in these regions. (Gottlieb: 1992; Goody: 1972; Goody: 1980; Fortes: 1945; Fortes: 1987; Tait: 1961) Shrines were often consulted when certain taboos were broken and the earth became polluted. Colleagues of Fortes noted how Asante considered the earth polluted or "defiled" when 1) a man cohabits with a woman in the bush; 2) work is performed on the land during certain restricted days ; 3) committing murder in the bush; 4) a man cohabits with his sister.

> The chief consults an ɔbosom who may tell him that someone has defiled the land. So he must purify it. The chief buys a sheep and slaughters it. Part of the slaughtered sheep is cut into very small pieces which are put on the eto. The eto and the meat are scattered round the town. (ASSM: AU, n.d.)

If McCaskie's data is correct, the shrine Hwe me so was brought into Asante through an unlikely southward path. If my data is correct, the route of carriage for Hwe me so was the more common northern or western passage. The second document suggests it even may have had an Asante origin. Trade and religious affiliations between Asante and areas in the north such as Wa, Gonja, Krachi and others were common. Asante saw these locations as having been successful at witchcraft eradication. Thus, entrepreneurs who imported shrines and talismans from the north transformed these cultural considerations into lucrative financial opportunities in their home communities.

Travel to Gonja and other areas for trade was so common that importing a

northern shrine into Asante became itself a kind of financial transaction. Shrines were considered as commodities of recognized status. Their value was high; and prices for shrines sold by its originator were fixed. Fortes describes the trek for three shrines which "came from the north."

> A man who had enough money collected a few relations, usually his uncles, his nephews, and his brothers; and they traveled to the north to buy the fetish. This implies staying in the Northern Territories to learn its drumming, the songs, customs and everything connected with the worship of the fetish. (MF: ASSM, 1945c)

Once the shrine was introduced into Asante, its fame preceded its arrival, even into fairly remote rural areas. "The fetish has spread rapidly through the District and itinerant apostles preach its powers and try to persuade the people to pay for the cost of a shrine." The shrine retained four principle salient features. "Fetish claims power: a) to make barren women bear; b) to make impotent men potent; c) to prevent people from committing a crime; d) to detect witches." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243) While there was some consistency of Hwe me so throughout Asante, it seems likely that these features were elaborated upon, and that the shrine's powers were adapted to local circumstances. Hwe me so did not gather the collective attention of communities or large groups of people under a common set of concerns as had been the case with Aberewa and ɔdomaŋkama. Rather, its uses appeared to address the anxieties, illnesses, and accusations of witchcraft of large numbers of individuals. Its popularity was well assured by 1921. Thus, those who purchased medicine and the right to administer Hwe me so as a fetish drink were able to recover most or all of their original expenses within relatively short time periods. Thus, like the popular herbalists and diviners who arose in pre and post colonial Africa (Mombeshora: 1994, p. 83), witch

finders of the Gold Coast created a precise and extensive network of clients.

Hwe me so was not the only witch finding cult in practice during this period. The Kunde shrine mentioned at the outset of this chapter was a contemporary of Aberewa; however, neither Kunde nor Hwe me so were the vehicles for expressions of political power as found in both Aberewa and ɔdomaŋkoma. Yet, because of the political rhetoric of these earlier cults, the British were continuously suspicious regarding the practices and intentions of cult members. One British official claimed of Hwe me so that "it is the prohibited "Aberewa" under another name."

This suspicion was combined with overt opposition by members of the Christian clergy, especially the Methodists, who saw the cults as both a means of extortion of parishioner's meager funds and as method of destroying their work of conversion. It was impossible, in the minds of the Methodists, to belong to a Christian community while participating in the "evils" of fetish shrines. However, most Asante populations, even many who had converted to Christianity, recognized the power and effectiveness of shrines and their akɔmfoɔ to effect healing and to alter the course of bodily malfunctions. Both interests provided a constant pleading of their concerns to the colonial administration who retained the power to make such movements a matter of law. Thus, the Archives contain a wealth of personal experiences of how the cults were offensive to some and essential to others. These experiences represent a wide range of personal interests and communal values. All of these experiences were gathered within a common conviction that bayi was rampant in society and nature. Hwe me so was continually seen as providing anecdotal remedies to the anxieties, evil effects, and physical maladies engendered by bayi.

One very popular shrine cult which was introduced into Asante from the Northeast was Dente. We have already seen above the popularity of Dente in times of war. Maier notes the fame of Dente was due to its location within both east-west and north-south trading routes. (Maier: 1983) Because of German destruction by explosives of the shrine at Kete-Krachi, the execution of a shrine priest in 1912, and the banning of the shrine's operations, Dente became a matter of debate among British officials and clergy in 1918-1924. Discussion centered on the presumed link between destroying the religious relic and the attempt to eradicate the associated religious practices. One administrator stated: "I know of no harm in the cult, and I do not suppose that the German explosives were more effectual in destroying a spirit than were the jeers of the sceptics of the former village; and I doubt if the suggested felling of trees would have any effect upon the worshipers other than to irritate and insult them." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/751) The acting Colonial Secretary, A.A.C. Finlay, appeared to agree. In 1919, he stated, "the fetish referred to should not be officially recognized, but on the other hand should not be interfered with unless its activities are found to be mischievous."

Dente was so well known and its power so respected that British officials considered the aftermath of the Dente shrine destruction before taking steps on other shrines within Asante. One letter considers Dente as having direct implications for legitimacy of Asante shrines.

> I informed his Excellency that in my opinion it would be impossible to stamp out the Dente Fetish, that it was so old and had such power that it would only move somewhere else, and then start again.
> If these views are accepted as correct, would it not be better to allow the fetish to be restarted at Krachi, where it can to a certain extent be supervised, than to run the risk

of it being practiced in secret.
In matters of this sort one has to take into account the mentality of the average African. It is quite enough for a fetish to be made illegal for it to become more powerful than ever. The average uneducated native would at once think that it was being suppressed because the Administration was afraid of it.
If one only goes into any village in Asante Juabin, one will find at the entrance [kurotia] a small cone of clay (Mr. Crowther says red, but I have always seen white earth), the Dente Fetish. Now is the Administration prepared to make the fetish illegal there and in other places mentioned. It will be hard to enforce at Krachi, the Head or Chief Temple of the cult if not enforced in other places.
It is a great pity to my mind that Major Jackson gave the Krachihene leave to rebuild the old Fetish town before the matter of the fetish has been settled. To a great extent, the one goes with the other; and it is hard for the African to understand why he is allowed one and note the other. It is, however in my opinion, too late now to cancel the permission given. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/751)

It was the Dente shrine which provided an early test case of legal and administrative power for British over indigenous ritual elements. Debate over Dente also set precedence on what methods of controlling witch finding would be considered useful and practical. The debate shows the inclinations of some to suppress, even destroy, the shrine. This approach was adopted by most European clergy. It was believed that by such forceful means were the vestiges of heathenism effectively removed. Others in the administration considered European disruption of family and religious life to be beyond legitimate claims which brought them to West Africa. For the time being, the Colonial Secretary was persuaded by arguments from the latter group. His informal ruling of 1921 allowed the continuation of Dente.

> I agree with Mr. Ross that the recognition (officially) of the Fetish is a retrograde step, and with Mr. Crowther that you cannot kill a spirit. I am not well acquainted with the Fetish in question but after perusal of the correspondence, I add: 1) do not officially recognize the Fetish; 2) do not interfere with the Fetish. E.T. Mansfield. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/751)

Procedures of submission to the powers of Hwe me so, as well as those of all

other shrines during the colonial period, were both medicinal and mystical. The patient or novice was prescribed to "drink with impunity the alleged mixture of poisonous herbs and other concoctions. Naturally his immunity from harm is ascribed to the supernatural powers of the Fetish." The dying position of a fowl, usually a chicken, is indicative of the guilt or innocence of the patient. Upon determining guilt, the patient was required by the shrine priest to "drink fetish." This was a sign of both allegiance to the shrine and its officiators, and an a oath of obedience to the stipulations stated by the priest. Some of the stipulations for the Kunde shrine were provided at the beginning of this chapter. These may be compared to those of Hwe me so, as compiled by S.W. Saxton in 1922.

> The regulations of the Fetish are: That it abhors certain things.
> a. That any member who bears malicious feelings shall die or pay a fine. Probably the reverse is also the case i.e., anyone working against a member.
> b. Any member practicing witchcraft shall die or pay a fine.
> c. Any member having connections with a woman during her menses shall die or pay a fine. The subjective woman is likewise punished.
> d. The Fetish has power to punish any member without going to Court. The inquisition mentioned of the knife corset seems to be used, the offender being threatened with numerous knives till he bows to the fetish for forgiveness. Considerable sacrifices of fowls and eggs are then made to signify that the offender is willing to pay 5 or 25.
> e. If the offender fails to pay after submission his death is demanded. It is alleged sacrifices have taken place in Pakro. It will be seen that the cult of the Fetish is most ingenuous and is a very simple and clever device for extorting money from the people when the local court fails to satisfy its rapacity. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

Sexual relations with menstruating women represented danger to the shrine. It was mentioned above that menstruating women were confined to a hut on the margins of the town or village. Both the color of the blood and the blood itself were powerful symbols in Asante cosmology. Red represented the "hot" danger of the wild; and blood was associated with the matrilineage. Sexual activity under this condition was polluting and

dangerous.

The administrative suppression of Aberewa by the British rendered participation at any level in shrine rituals to be a crime. Punishment could be imprisonment; but most often a fine of money or some domestic animal was required as payment of penalty. British objected to the shrines for at least three reasons. First, their experiences with ɔdomaŋkama in the court of Mensa Bonsu identified the great political strengths which this movement had among its adherents. If insurrection was possible against the Asante state, it was certainly possible against the British. Secondly, as Aberewa and Hew me so became less political, but more mystical in focus, the British identified the practices, the songs and dances, and also the fetish shrine priests as participants in cults of evil. This participation detracted from the covert purposes of Methodist and Presbyterian missions in two ways. Methodists believed that the same person could not be both a cult member and a devout Christians; and shrine rituals, which were often held on Fridays and Sundays, often conflicted with Methodist Sabbath services in Kumasi and other locations. Third, the British believed the presence of witch finding shrines in the Gold Coast inhibited strides toward civilization. They were considered regressive in superstition and in charlatan-like practices of fraud and money doubling. For these reasons, which will be explored further in chapter V, Governor F.G. Guggisberg issued an Order in Council no. 21 on December 9, 1922 which banned any use or reference to Hwe me so anywhere within the Colony. The Order is reproduced here to provide some indication of the legal language of suppression common to the times.

Under and by virtue of the provisions of section 14 of the Native Customs Ordinance,

> I, Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, Governor of the Gold Coast Colony, with the advice of the Executive Council thereof, am hereby pleased to issue this my Order ordering, as it is hereby ordered, that the celebration of all native customs, rites, ceremonies, and worship of or in connection with the fetish variously known as HWEMISU, FWE-ME-SO, BUANI, EGUASA, KWANA, KWKU, NFRAMA, KWASA, DONKOR, BREKU, KWESI, AKUA, SAKRA (or howsoever otherwise the said fetish may be styled or known) shall be suppressed; and further that any person participating in any such celebration shall, independently of any other legal liability, be deemed guilty of a breach of this Order, and on summary conviction thereof shall be liable to a fine not exceeding twenty-five pounds. (NAG: A.D.M., 11/1243)

The practicality of witch finding shrines was never evident to the British. Asante who wished to pursue mystical protections for themselves and of their communities through such shrines considered the shrines as capable of countering the real and salient powers of the wild. Pleas to the government to reinstate shrines which had been removed demonstrate the practicality and mystical agency of shrine powers. One particular plea was written to the Central Provincial Commissioner in June, 1922.

> Now I pray your worship to listen the fact which has prompted the writing of this application to you for the restoration of the fetish, that for the past few months this fetish was removed from here, the evil practices of witchcraft and injurious actions of bad medicines are so soon reigning here badly than before the fetish was brought to the town and I am afraid if I do not endeavor to get it back it would be very dangerous.
> I on behalf of myself and elders pray that your worship could see from the foregoing that we did not get that fetish here for fancy or [to] destroy human life not to do any injury but only to save and protect the inhabitants in the town from the effects of bad medicines and evil practices and witchcraft.
> Under the foregoing circumstances, I pray your worship to have mercy on your poor people here and order the restoration of the fetish back to us and we shall ever thank you with never-to-be obliterated remembrance of you for your kindness in saving us in this way. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

This statement underscores the context of anxiety, if not alarm, that often surrounded practices of witch finding in colonial Africa. It may be claimed that in both pre

and post colonial Asante, witch finding is best understood if located in a complex of local ideological and symbolic relations. This complex is historic in content. In pre-colonial times, it arose as the result of a lengthy articulation between local, even personal interests, and larger concerns of the state. During colonialism, the social environment of anxiety grew out of articulations between Asante and European systems of knowledge and practice. Data from the National Archives of Ghana suggest the "universal" nature of witchcraft. It appears to have been as ubiquitous for Asante as the Christian notion of deity was for the Methodists. Sources of authority and power, notably the Old and New Testaments, served as knowledge for Methodists, Catholics and Presbyterians in the Gold Coast. For Asante, the options were more plural. European sources of power were acknowledged; but traditional sources were never entirely ruled out. The challenge in understanding the rise of witch finding in pre and post colonial Asante involves comprehending its articulation in the regional political economy. A basis for this political economy has been explained in chapters two and three.

However, an attempt has been made to abstain from understanding witch finding in a purely rationalistic or economist framework. Rather, it is necessary to see the cults as articulations on the human body and its experience in the world. Cults are also articulations between of the body or personhood and wider social and historic processes. This articulation is expressed at the level of bodily illness, disease, and barrenness. Asante witchcraft involves, as shown earlier in this chapter, fundamental notions of the body and of sunsum. As such, they provide an historic context for understanding Asante personhood. As outlined recently by Turner, "the appropriations of bodiliness, in all its aspects, from sexuality and reproductive capacities to sensory powers and physical health, strength, and

appearance, is the fundamental matrix, the material infrastructure, so to speak, of the production of personhood and social identity." (Turner: 1994, p. 28) In other words, control over the human body implies control of the "social relations of personal production." Witch finding medicines anointed on the body were equally applied to non human objects and circumstances. These applications confirm Asante sentiments that witchcraft existed in society, and that Hwe me so and other medicine shrines could alleviate threats, anxieties and other evil results. Cult medicines thus, "all acted to increase or decrease the capacities of whatever they were applied to, whether inanimate objects or living beings." (Fernandez: 1982, p. 121)

In the final section of this chapter, we will see how witch finding movements between 1923 and 1945 may be viewed as means of power, or rather, a means of control over the human body. Descriptions of these later shrines illustrate changes which took place since the decline of the state in 1870.

**4.6 Senya Gupo, Tongo and Tigare: "Snakes, Tigers and Many Other Forms of Wonderful Animals."**

The Reverend Robert Hamill Nassau lived in West Africa for over 40 years before putting down on paper his impressions of the life of a missionary in Cameroon. Like most other missionaries in West Africa, Nassau was profoundly interested in the religious life of local populations. Like other Europeans, Nassau observed the great differences between European Christianity and religion in Africa. Many of these differences concerned mystical effects of witchcraft and what was known in the nineteenth century as "fetishism," a phrase which emphasized the shrines used in witch finding and other rites. Nassau

observed that while fetishism involved religious practices, it also concerned personal "motives." These motives, he claimed, were the basis of local "religious life." The motives and practices of witchcraft, observed Nassau, did not always relate to the "soul or its future" or to spirituality as did the doctrines of Methodism. Instead, rites of the shrines focused on the physical body and on the immediacy of the human condition.

> The sense of a great need that makes him look for help outside of himself is not based on a desire to obey God's will, but on his and some spirit's co-relation to the great needs of this mortal life.
> The salvation sought being a purely physical one, the thoughts that direct the use of means to that end are limited to physical needs, and largely to physical agencies...One of these agencies is prayer; other agencies are sacrificial offerings, and the use of amulet charms, or talismans, known as fetishes. (Nassau: 1904, pp. 90-91)

African uses of the body, its symbolism and healing mechanisms within ritual, provided evidence to Europeans that they were witnessing events which were entirely foreign to their own existence. Observations of such differences were made by missionary and administrator alike. Differences arose from within nineteenth century naturalism and its scientific discoveries of racial and biological diversity. As noted in chapter two, nineteenth century concepts of race and biology reinforced earlier notions of civilization as the defining criteria which separated Europeans from Africans.

Under colonialism, bodily dissimilarities became the foundation of a medical and scientific discourse of difference. These dissimilarities were central to the rising science of naturalism. They also stoked the flame of exploration which had consumed much of Europe well before the eighteenth century. For British abroad in West Africa, the mission of conversion was aimed at building a new "Jerusalem" similar to what had been constructed

in "England's green and pleasant land."

As in England, Methodists brought a vision of constructing a working middle class through their conversion. Their quest included a revitalization of labor, which was itself an effort to regulate the body. Much of the dialogue of colonialism in West and South Africa justified European expansion of governments and missions in order to bestow upon the African a keener sense of science and of medical care. (Fink: 1990, p. 35) Since Africa was seen as dark and exotic, with undiscovered recesses and contours like the interior of a body, there was "intrinsic value in laying it bare to the probing eye of the European observer." (Comaroff and Comaroff: 1991, p. 90) Indeed, Megan Vaughan has argued that European concepts of the body and of disease became "intrinsic to the operation of colonial power" in Anglophone Africa. (Vaughan: 1991, p. 8)

In other words, perceived differences and antipathies between Europe and Africa received physical and biological articulation through discourses regarding healing of the body. Such differences were most pronounced through ritual dancing, singing, sacrifice and the varieties of illness. Christian clergy and government administrators differed in the degree to which they found such aspects of African life intolerable. In the final section of this chapter we see how the witch finding movements of the 1930s and 1940s differed in content from those of a generation earlier, and how these differences reflected the presence of a colonial power. While data suggests the presence of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of witch finding shrines, the three principal cults of this era were Senya Gupo, Tigare, and Tongo. These were found throughout much of Asante, and in other areas of the Colony. All three are treated in some detail.

Senya Gupo arose in Asante in 1928. This shrine was imported from Gonja, but may have had ties with the Ivory Coast. Senyon was the Gonja village where the owner of the shrine resided. Kipo was the name of the shrine in Gonja. While no mention is given of the name of this man, it is stated that he "is the head of all Gbanya (Gonja) land and acts as judge in all land cases brought to the Yabumwura's Court of Appeal." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886) Senya Gupo was invoked in the legal proceedings of court appeals. "There is no higher form of oath possible in the Gbanya country." This priest was condemned to death during the Gonja-Bole conflict of 1917. But before his execution was set, he was subsequently pardoned. His shrine was later restored, and "continued to hold its position as the premier shrine in the Gbanya Kingdom." District Commissioner A.W. Cardinall noted in 1930 that Senya Gupo provided medicines, "by which is meant merely an extract as it were of the god." When administered by those who have legitimate authority, shrine medicines were used for a common assortment of personal afflictions. "The power of these gods is almost confined to conferring good: such as rendering women pregnant, restoring to impotent men their powers, averting famine and plagues." The shrine contained a residual capacity for detecting witches. "A secondary power is that of witch finding; but this is generally used by the alleged witch and not forced upon accused persons." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

Descriptions by colonial officials often provided first hand accounts of the considered benign practices and content of witch finding cults. Other officials believed that government should not take up issue with such native customs. Thus, in 1930, the Acting Attorney General made the following statement. "So long as the Gold Coast Legislature

recognizes witchcraft as a reality and its practices as an offence I do not see how it can be made an offence to charge a person with practicing witchcraft or with being a witch." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886) Nevertheless, in 1930 the Governor issued a comprehensive Order in Council making all practices of witch finding a matter of law. After this order, Senya Gupo and other witch finding cults received unprecedented legal scrutiny and prosecution.

In 1937, a tribunal was held in which 13 persons offered testimony concerning their involvement with the Senya Gupo shrine at Kwaman. In particular, an account by one of those present provides insight into "the agency of her witchcraft." She describes her deeds while acting as a witch. She also discloses the effects of shrine medicines on her capacity to act as a witch.

> My name is Essie Twiwah, am of clear and sound mind. I don't suffer from any delirium tremens. I am a witch, as well as Kwesi Gyan and the rest of the accused. I know them well. I myself testify and verily state before the Court that all I have mentioned their names are undoubted devils, which means they are all possessing witchcraft. We all go to chop in the night of human flesh on the top of the Oyan tree at Kwaman. I used to take somebody's child and each of the accused also used to bring some and we eat it. I killed my own two children and ate them with the accused together because I take someone's child and on my turn I send mine also. So with each of us. I have killed Kobina Ata, one of the twins of the accused Kwesi Gyan. I take the heart of every person that is killed with a knife and give it to the men to divide it. I eat the middle body of the accused, and the accused eats the head; and the rest is divided or shared among the rest accused. On flying up at night, I turn as Akroma. Kwesi Gyan also turns as Osaasa and some snakes, tigers and many other forms of wonderful animals. On eating in cassava, corn and cocoa farms, we turn or changed into Nkrantsi and Wuansa — we set fire on some of the cocoa farms. Hence you see some cocoa farms are spoiled. We have eaten corn, cassava and cocoa farms of Chief Kofi Donkor. My witchcraft is a snake, or Okyimbir, lies on my breast, in my eyes and in my private. My waist beads are also Okyimbir as well as my hairs. We eat human flesh on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and eat in farms on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. On Sundays we rest.
> Persons killed: my own two children, and caused abortion. I killed my late grandfathers Chief Yaw Fosu; Kwesienuah's son and daughter, Yaw and Ama; Kwesienuah's son and daughter, Ekua Yamuah and Kobina Atta; Kwegyiriwah's two

> sons, their names I have forgotten; Gyapiawah's son, Kofi; Adjuah Egyimbah's daughter. We have taken away the honor of Kwesi Eyan and Kofi Donkor.
> I shared the persons and children killed with all the accused. They are all possessing witchcraft as myself. I can know them because I am possessing. None of them can defy me; neither can they deny me. We have set fire on Ekua Edu's cocoa trees; I can swear oath to butt any of the accused denial. I am possessing witchcraft. When we go to the medicine I can be able to lose down some of my snakes, at present being many people I am shameful to do so. I ask Nana to find some medicine to cure me. I beg him to do so. I have killed many people with the rest of the accused. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

A 1935 report by A.C. Russell, Commissioner of the Western District, described the prevalence of Senya Gupo and Tigare shrines in his region. Both shrines, he said, "emanated from the Northern Territories." Both were different from Hwe me so, "though it is possible that the objects and effects are similar."

Russell noted the presence of the shrines in at least ten villages. Based on his direct observations, he estimated that "between twenty and thirty" other villages in the district also had shrines. Russell was able to provide a likeness of both shrines. He said the shrines were "usually housed in fenced compounds on the outskirts of the village in a prominent position; Senya Gupo being conspicuous for its cleanliness and air of well being; Tigare equally conspicuous for the reverse." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

The chief of Brenasi reported to Russell that "Europeans used to come here and prospect for gold but they never returned. Senya Gupo found nine witches who were hiding the gold and diamonds in the soil from the Europeans." Russell then noted that all of these nine witches were subsequently apprehended and prosecuted under the 1930 Order. Russell also observed that Senya Gupo and Tigare shrines were found in Fante, Akuapem, and Asante regions.

A second report on Senya Gupo was filed by E.A. Attah, Superintendent of Police at Bekwai. Attah claims the origin of Senya Gupo to be in the northern village of Senyon, a town in Bole. Its titles, or aliases, were "Agyinkwa / Savior; Oboafo / Helper; Okatakyi / Warrior." The shrine was imported into Asante in 1933 by four men whose names were Kwaku Kyei, Kojo Abortrim, Kojo Mensah, and Kwami Danso, of the village os Nsuaem near Bekwai. They traveled to the north, where under the direction of the akɔmfoɔ, all four "drank the medicine of the Fetish together with kola nuts." They then persuaded the shrine priest to allow them to import the medicine to Bekwai and two nearby towns. Residents of the communities "were made to pay 150 pounds sterling each" in order to establish the shrine. This fee was raised for all three towns since the shrines were considered to be able to "protect its servants, their children and properties from witches, and [it] would help barren women to produce children." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) Popularity of the shrine was great. By February of 1934, it had been established in the villages of Twindroasi [Twendruase] and Brenase. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/10)

Twendruase had been a home turf for Hwe me so, where in 1928 the shrine had "a great reputation and enjoys a large revenue." The site became renown for shrine worship and for healing. "It is rumored that as much as eight pounds sterling is charged at times. The influence of Twendruase is not confined to the district and I know from outside sources people have come from Kumase to consult it." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/452)

Senya Gupo was characterized by an organizational hierarchy which consisted of "seven grades of positions among the officers." The chief priest, or akɔmfoɔ, and his assistant "fetish priests are to purify the fetish and the servants and to offer rum for the fetish

and also to investigate witch matters."

At the third and fourth grades, "the gyasehene and his assistant are the supervisors of the fetish servants during all ceremonies." The linguists, who are the fifth grade, "deliver speech to the priests from the servants." The cook, at level six, "slaughters and prepares mutton soup for the fetish officers and servants. The soup contains no salt nor pepper." At grade seven, "the messengers carry messages from the priests to anyone concerned." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

A participant of the cult offered a description of the "worshiping place" of Senya Gupo. His description indicates that by 1935, shrines had become less mobile. They were, instead, fixed to certain geographical locations. This data supports observations by Rattray in 1921 of the stationary nature of Hwe me so shrines near Lake Bosomtwe. For Senya Gupo:

> Each town has a large fence measuring 40 foot by 40 foot; and within the fence is a pile of stones measuring about 2 feet high. On the eastern side of the pile of stones is one spear and another on the western side firmly fixed in the ground; on the northern side of the same piled stones are rolls of bottles in an oblong form fixed in the ground. Three cutlasses are weapons of the Fetish and the bottles are the decorations. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

Bodily apparrel, especially in the styles of western fashion, were strictly prohibited. Hats, handkerchiefs, walking sticks, sandals, cigars, and chewing tobacco were not allowed within the confines of the fence surrounding the shrine. Entering the grove of the shrine while wearing clothing worn during sexual relations or while attending a funeral was prohibited. Women were not allowed to mention the name of the fetish shrine during the menstrual cycle. Use of salt and pepper to consume any fetish drink or meats was

prohibited. Violations were punishable by payment of a sheep. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/10)

Days of ritual performance of shrine medicinal healing and of witch finding were Sundays and Fridays. Rites began in the morning with dancing by the akɔmfoɔ, who danced unceasingly in Hausa gowns until the ritual ended.

Those who were afflicted or who suspected witchcraft were able to have the "favor" of the fetish extended to them by revealing their secrets to the ɔkɔmfɔ through the linguists. The priests collects two pounds sterling and kola nuts from the man or woman, turns to the shrine and speaks the following words. "Nana, this person wishes to come under your protection and I pray that you may receive and protect him or her so, here are his or her money and kola nuts." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) The priest then deposits the money and kola nuts upon a nearby pile of stones. This is followed by the priest offering liquid medicine prepared from base of native herbs. The medicine is consumed by the patient. The priest, in turn, offers the kola nut to the patient to chew. The person is then considered initiated and a devotee of the fetish shrine. He or she must observe the "bye laws" of the fetish: Do not steal; do not curse anybody in the bush; do not express allegiance to another shrine; do not possess any poisonous drink; priests must eschew attendance at any funeral.

Performance of this ritual provided a context of healing for the novice; but it also initiated him or her into the shrine's protection against witchcraft. Senya Gupo was thereby able to detect and dispel the effects of witchcraft upon those who professed allegiance to the shrine. Thus, when a member of Senya Gupo is in close proximity to someone who may be ill, the suspicion of witchcraft may arise toward the ill person. He is dispatched to the confines of the shrine where the priest attempts to coerce a confession of

witchcraft from their lips. "If the person resists he or she would be threatened that he or she would die, but would be saved by the Fetish if he or she predicts that he or she is a witch." Fearing death or grave illness, a confession is often forthcoming.

After the confession, the sick person is asked to provide a chicken for the priest to sacrifice. The fowl is killed in a manner of divination. The side of the neck is slightly cut. A linguist utters the words, "Okatakyi (warrior) if this sick person has made a true confession then give us a proper sign." The chicken is thrown into the air. As it lands, if the body points up the confession is considered true. If the body lands downward, the confession is considered false. If the confession is accepted, the sick person is required to pay a sheep and seven pounds sterling to the fetish priest. The sheep is killed and eaten by the cult officials. The money is retained by the cult. Part of his hair is cut with a scissors to indicate he has been identified as a witch. Finally, the sick person is given medicine of the shrine to drink, and he or she is thereby initiated as a member of Senya Gupo.

In cases where the chicken lands facing downward, and the person persists in refusing to disclose his witchcraft, "he or she is left alone to die without being attended by the relatives." The death is considered the result of the power of the fetish shrine.

By 1930, the fame and influence of Senya Gupo had spread far beyond Asante, and was well established in Fante coastal areas and in the inland regions of Akim and Akuapem. The popularity of Senya Gupo was a major reason for administrative attempts to once again try and restrict practices of witch finding through legislation. Senya Gupo continued as a healing cult, however, until at least 1945. At that time, the colonial government began a new approach of recognizing the medicinal features of witch finding

movements by causing the priest practitioners to be medically licensed.

During this same period of 1930, another shrine which appears to have risen rapidly in popularity is Tongo, also known as the fetish shrine Kwaben Assifu. Some suspected Tongo to be a clandestine form of Senya Gupo. Others believe it maintained its own identity, ownership and clientele. The origins of Tongo are uncertain. One report claims it began at Suhum. Elsewhere it is reported to have migrated from the Tong Hills near Zuarugu. Tongo is mentioned in connection with both Senya Gupo and Tigare, although one write up mentions that it also "is attended with peculiarly disgusting practices." These practices supposedly refer to the treatment of persons who are revealed to be witches. These persons "are generally quite old women."

Under Tongo, once a person is "found to be a witch they are stripped naked in public and shaved, head, eyebrows and elsewhere, and beaten over the head with a "magic" wand attached to the fetish." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886) The usual fee for this rite is five pounds sterling, plus gin and chickens. This method of magical detection and treatment of witches by a "wand" diverges greatly from other forms of witch finding at the time. Tongo is no different from other shrines during this period concerning its religious commissions. Its work "consists solely of giving medicinal relief and cure to those bewitched or suffering from other ill effects of the practice of witchcraft; and secondly, of the practice of providing facilities for those accused or suspected of witchcraft to confess or be given the facility to prove themselves free or otherwise of the charge." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886) Nevertheless, no mention is given of medicinal herbs or liquids, at least during the processes of witch finding and redemption; and no mention is made of the suspected or self-

disclosed witch being made to "drink fetish." Rather, curative treatment consists of other forms of magic. The account does cite the presence of three bottles of "Tongo medicine," but does not explain their usage.

The effectiveness of this treatment was well recognized as legitimate. The cult itself was "free from being inimical of any kind and it protects lives and properties which might have been instantaneous victim to the colossal effects of the venomous practice of the witches and sorcerers." The Asante writer of this document hastens to add: "Any believer of the lesser gods cannot find a better place to soothe his sorrows, especially when bewitched." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

Tongo faded from popularity as quickly as it arose. Its appearance lasted for less than a decade. Although she heard references made to Tongo, Margaret Field saw no evidence of Tongo shrines in Asante or in Akim where they were once abundant. (Field: 1960, p. 90) The data suggests that by 1935, either the original owners of Tongo shrines had died, or they had turned their attentions in other directions. A third possibility is that the shrines had simply changed proprietorship and names.

Tigare was another shrine which appeared after Hwe me so. Its content incorporated several features of Islam. These included the taboo against consumption of pork, the removal of sandals while within the shrine sanctuary, ritual clothing worn by the priest, and a mosque-like shrine which often appeared outside the more principal compound. Tigare also included strong elements of Christianity. Like several other cults of the twentieth century, Tigare demanded a series of behavioral sanctions which resembled the Ten Commandments. The District Commissioner at Juaso even likened Tigare to a form of

insurance. "It is in fact a social club analogous to the Slate Clubs amongst the working classes in England whereby a group of persons secure insurance against misfortune by subscription." (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61)

Popularity of these features brought Tigare shrines from Asante into other areas of the Gold Coast including Ewe. From there, it spread eastward into Togo and Dahomey, and even as far as Nigeria where it has been recognized as Atinga among the Yoruba since 1950. (Morton-Williams: 1956; Apter: 1993)

Unlike witch finding movements found earlier in the Gold Coast, Tigare familiarized itself across a wide spectrum of political and religious climates. Tigare adapted to the regions of West Africa much the same as zar did in East Africa or bori in Muslim West Africa. In this sense, Tigare "spread far beyond its origins and found resonances amid local politico-religious tensions. It might be read as a ritual manifestation of the impending bourgeois revolution known as "independence," embedded with its leadership's sense of colonial power and the religiously hybrid constitution of" new, adaptive states such as Oyo in Yoruba. (Matory: 1994: p. 74) We will see in this section, however, that the politics of Tigare in the Gold Coast, while combined with medico-religious practices, were never as explicit as found in the Oyo Empire.

Christensen claims that Tigare entered the Gold Coast through northern Ivory Coast sometime around 1918. (Christensen: 1954, p. 389) However, data supplied in the National Archives of Ghana and my own interviewing indicate that the cult comes from regions near Wa in Northern Ghana. The District Commissioner's Office of Bekwai wrote in 1938, "In my opinion, every successful treatment of a suffering person carried out by these

abosom which have been brought from the Northern Territories, (Tigare itself is from Wa) may be described as detection of witchcraft; if by that we mean the detection of the human agent who, by spiritual means, is supposed to have caused the harm in general." (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61)

In 1931, the omanhene of Ahafo wrote of the practices of Tigare in his village in western Asante. Tigare was renown among other shrines for its mystical and medicinal capacities. "Its superiority of healing disease of all kind is very recommendable, which couples with excellent powers of catching witchcraft and persons who try to endanger human life with obnoxious medicines. It is also very essential for treatment of birth medicines." (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61) The same observations of the fame of Tigare was made seven years later in Bekwai. This segment from 1938 notes the agency of both the practitioners and participants of Tigare in regards to its healing powers.

> Tegari has shrines in many villages throughout this district, and like nearly every abosom that has been brought from the Northern Territories to Ashanti, its whole function is to protect those who serve it from harm, and, when one of its servants has suffered unusual or unnatural harm, to point out from among those who have already come voluntarily to serve it, the *human agent by whose spiritual interference the harm has been caused*...As far as my information goes, people go to serve this and other similar abosom of their *own free will* and it is only after they have thus voluntarily accepted the authority of the abosom, that they are liable to be caught for contravening its codes, and even in the case where the head of a family wishes the rest of the family to serve the abosom, *they are at liberty to refuse, and over those who refuse to serve it the abosom has no power whatever.* (Emphasis added) (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61)

Tigare also had capacity for catching "devils, thieves, persons who curse their friends with juju," (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) and other persons who were capable of swearing innocence of theft or witchcraft in front of the shrine, but whose actions proved

otherwise. The shrine was also known to provide "protection against the practice of noxious medicines," in "helping barren women to procreate," and "is for the general protection of the people at large." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) Tigare was also known to bring "happiness and prosperity into a town.

By 1935, one report concluded, "Most of the villagers are having this fetish." Most local chiefs approved of the use of Tigare. In pre-colonial times, it was the guardianship of a priest to administer to the mystical protection of a lineage or of a village. While this role continued in the British era, even in a diminished capacity, a village chief would also receive part of the payments made to the priest. On rare occasions when chiefs opposed certain witch finding shrines, it is also likely that they were not included in such revenue sharing.

The affairs of Tigare were similar to other witch finding shrines of this period. The emphasis was on healing the body in a mystical and herbal fashion, and on disclosing the identity of the perpetrator and suffering the guilty to party to undergo "drinking fetish." After all of this, a substantial fee is given by all participants to the priest. The following is a report from 1941.

> If anybody suffers from sickness, or if a woman fails to bring forth, the complainant lays his complaint before the fetish, after giving kola and making a payment of six pence. The priest lays the kola by the fetish, pours libation upon it, and gives it to the complainant to chew. This acts as a medicine and cures the sickness. The fetish then brings influences to bear upon the guilty party, if there is one, to confess. When he confesses, he pays two pounds sterling to the fetish, and may then "go free." The chief priest said that those who confess always do pay this money, but that if anyone did not, his affairs would not prosper and he would have bad luck. The fetish does not tell the injured party or the priests who is responsible, but works upon the guilty person, if any, to confess. Not every complaint is followed by a confession. The fetish can work on guilty persons whether they belong to the membership of

worshipers or not. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

British administrators were remarkably reluctant to find condemning review of Tigare. During the 1930s, attention of district commissioners focused less upon the cult itself. Rather, they were more concerned with the unscrupulous and questionable practices of shrine priests. In 1938, the Commissioner at Bekwai recommended that those who sought Tigare healing performances be subject to pay only 13 pounds sterling for their treatment. "Any priest whose charge exceeds this prescribed amount renders himself liable to be punished by the Native Authority." Likewise, priests would not be allowed to continue seizing the property or belongings "left by any worshiper after death; such properties are always taken over by the heirs of the deceased according to our custom of inheritance." (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61) Finally, it was suggested that priests not have the power to constrain any person into worship or into "drinking fetish." Rather, "whoever worships it does so with his or her own free will."

Because neither Tigare nor any other witch finding cults did not develop a uniform set of rituals or doctrinal prescriptions, such as those found in the written liturgies of Methodism, rites differed in content and creativity. During early years of Tigare, 1918?-1945, creative differences were manifested via the mystical forces of abosom. Most often, these descended "into a container as a meteor and [were] covered by something which grows to fill the receptacle as a dough of bread grows up rapidly and fills the dough-tin or can." (ASSM: MF n.d.a) Field witnessed a similar manifestation of abosom during a performance of Tigare.

The priest stands before the door of the sanctuary holding on his head the sacred

> receptacle which the *obosom* is believed to inhabit. This is a hollow cylindrical object with one end flat and other a rounded cone. Its capacity is about that of a bucket and it is usually encased in the hid of some wild animal. It contains the object believed to have fallen from heaven when the obosom was "captured." (Field: 1960, p. 102)

Furthermore, Field noted to Eva Meyerowitz that, "I've just heard that some *abosom* have their origin by being "taken out of the water" rather than falling out of the sky." (MJF: EVP) Supporting and augmenting images were created and transformed during ritual processes by an accruement of human agency. Additional creative images surrounded the conditions of illness and the body. These necessitated contact with the shrine and the ɔkɔmfoɔ.

We have seen in chapter two how abosom were manifest in Asante society and cosmology since the inception of the state in 1701. These mystical entities provided a means of both power and danger. Abosom generated a fundamental sense of geography of the surrounding natural world from which Asante culture was to draw some its most basic images of human society and the bush. Abosom mediated between the two worlds of culture and nature, and were clearly partial to neither. As read by McCaskie, abosom simultaneously "embodied and represented a primary classification of the awesome, untamed, threatening and potentially destructive powers inherent in that universe. The abosom were consulted, directly or through the medium of akɔmfoɔ, about baffling occurrences, obscurities of meaning, or in moments of biological, psychological or existential impasse." (McCaskie: 1995, p. 117)

Throughout generations of control and command by asantehene, abosom were recognized sources of mystical power for heads of state. Dente shrine, as noted, was consulted in times of war, the most central enduring aspect of the Asante kingdom from the

times of Osei Tutu until its twilight in the late nineteenth century. One 1930s source of mythology states that the Brong shrine/oracle Kukuro was said to date back to the mid eighteenth century. At that time, the Asantehene Opoku Ware consulted the shrine before going into war. This was especially noted after a battle with Techiman in 1731. "After this war, Opoku Warri used to send his Nsumakwahene to consult and ask the support of Kukuro before he went on a campaign." (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61)

By 1879, mystical powers of witch finding were contested by private citizens in a open act of defiance of state authority. Members of this movement held the king and his court in contempt of historical truths: the rightful descent of the powers of a state ancestral hero. When the next documentation of witch finding in Asante appeared in 1906, Aberewa was managed entirely by non state personnel. Witch finding still involved political themes; however, after the appearance of Tigare in 1918, influences of modern economies appear to have altered the content and orientation of the shrines.

By early to mid twentieth century, abosom were identified through new imagery. This imagery was both more modern and was increasingly economic in nature. Both evolving features denied the state and its historical representation and continuity. Abosom and their priests were now more than a generation removed from being controlled exclusively by state authorities for the pursuit of state concerns. Their rites of healing were identifiable as themes of the individual: illness, prosperity, procreation, wealth, status, health, and safety. All of these themes fell under the shield of defense against witchcraft. All appeared to have involved imagery, use, and protection of the person.

Jahoda has suggested that by 1930, Ghanaian witch catching movements were

occupied by individuals who were utilizing the mystical powers of the shrines in order to overcome personal conditions of poverty, and to seek economic investments and personal financial prosperity. He noted that only five per cent literate Ghanaians no longer believed witchcraft was real or needed to be controlled. The other 95% thus considered their own personal material and financial successes and failures to be the result of witchcraft, at least to some extent. Witches were believed to be tormenting these individuals by causing business decline, crop failures, and trading disasters, and so forth. Witch finding shrines were utilized to improve personal effectiveness in matters of business. Shrine powers were petitioned to influence sales or monetary transactions in favor of shrine devotees, or to use magic involving natural phenomenon such as a harvest. (Jahoda: 1966, p. 205) When purchased, such a move would allow the cult members great successes in business. "All I know," wrote one administrator in 1938, "is that people drink [fetish] for protection of their lives and their personal effects — preferably cocoa and foodstuff farms — from destruction by evil means." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/213)

The entrepreneurial spirit of the Gold Coast encouraged private businessmen to invest in known commodities such as lumber, rubber, gold, or cocoa and in trading of commodities. These same transactions could be protected against competition, failure and ruin of a mystical sort. Indeed, no one entered business deals without the protective rites of a witch catcher's shrine. It was simply too risky otherwise. Business and financial successes were soon built upon a foundation of protection through the shrines. Those who profited the most were clearly sustained in their successes by witch catching shrines. Witch finding was thus integral to the formation of a new entrepreneurial elite in the Gold Coast.

One informant explained to Field that *abosom* had told him through a priest, "Everybody envies you because you are clever. You must walk very carefully. Never accept a drink from anyone." This man then responded. "I have heard and thank you. I will do what you say." He then confidently proceeded to plant a new yam farm. (Field: 1960, pp. 116-117)

By 1930, the British had taken clear and decisive measures to suppress witch catching rites. This included the promise of incarceration for priests and any other shrine sponsors. Meanwhile, priests had developed an entrepreneurial spirit of tradesmen, one which flourished in a free market economy. Their trade was the lucrative power of healing and of protections against unwanted supernatural encroachments. Their powers of healing and witch-finding were being vended at full market value, and their income was making them richer than even some of the most successful businessmen. In a letter to Meyerowitz in about 1958, Field writes:

> I think the *abosom* that I go to see in Asueyi is a new one since your day and is an "*abosom-brafo*: specializing in catching witches. Only a few of the old ones are not commercialized these days and used mainly or wholly for money making. Some of the most highly educated people in the country go to them to get protection from their enemies. A lawyer recently was at Bredi because he was sick; and last week a National Assembly member was at Mframaso. (MJF: EMP)

Other data supplied by Margaret Field reveal the elitist tendencies of fetish shrines after 1930 . Data on class, income, and level of literacy of cult members were not available before Field began her work in 1929. In Asante, among the literates who sought protection and help from witch finding shrines in the 1930s were a wide range of business men and women. These included men terminated from several jobs, teachers, a mine worker,

an auctioneer in debt, store keepers, a government clerk, a tailor, several cocoa buyers, two policemen, a number of carpenters, a government agricultural worker, students who failed exams, a bar tender, and an assortment of private businessmen. They commonly complained that, "My hand has become a sieve. Money does not stay with me; it becomes *basaa* (disorderly) and I do not know how it goes." (Field: 1960, p. 109) Likewise, a storekeeper uttered the following supplication before the Kunde shrine in 1933. "I am a petty trader. I find that my business is not prospering and that I am making losses instead of profit. Nana Kunde, I beg you to watch over my affairs and "catch" the person who has cast an evil spell over it." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/213)

Among the many cases of those who came to shrines such as Tigare for protection, Field logged the following entries. A teacher claimed witches were "spoiling" his teaching and had made his wife barren. Because of witchcraft, a truck driver said he could not make money and that his wife could not conceive. A woman's business failed, and her husband left her for a new wife. A man's cocoa farm was in ruin, and five of his children had died. A literate diamond miner who could not make money. He was also developed impotency and his wives were barren. A carpenter's son had run away, and his wife refused him sex. (Field: 1960, pp. 108-109) As in a previous generation, when ɔdomaŋkama addressed political concerns of commoners within a declining and predatory Empire, witch finding shrines of the late early twentieth century Asante became the means of dealing with conditions of a modern age. Witchcraft could cause instant ruin as well as spontaneous wealth. Witchcraft flourished within the new economies. It produced unprecedented rates of sterility, impotency and infant and child mortality. As Monica Wilson has suggested,

witchcraft is truly the nightmare of kinship. Social relations in Asante, especially between kin, were adjusting to the spread and magnificent powers of wealth and of commodities.

As noted above, the increase of material wealth by the end of the nineteenth century began to produce statuses of persons based on class. Entrepreneurs were making their fortunes in rubber, gold and cocoa. Clark has noted that personal wealth is not inconsistent with values of the matrilineage. Indeed, a vital aspect of social personhood for men, women and children is the ability to "control autonomous resources." (Clark: 1994, p. 107) Nevertheless, sudden and excessive wealth of a member of one's matrilineage brought suspicions of witchcraft. As the income and status of investors changed as a result of newly acquired cocoa money, people began to suspect them of using magic to achieve success. The rich also attempted to protect their assets against the witchcraft of jealous ones. (Obeng: 1996, p. 115) A similar remark was given by a shrine priest to Fortes in 1945.

> Ashanti people are full of jealousy. Whenever they see that someone who is below them in age or rank succeeds in doing any great thing, they become envious and wish him ill, and then find means to kill him.
> No one but a persons own *abusuafo* [clan or lineage mate] can kill him. A man's own sister may try to kill him in order that her son could inherit his property. (MF: 1945g)

The setting for these sentiments was often the matrilineage. One informant told Field, "my kinsmen envy me and have sent me a sickness." (Field: 1960, p. 115) Kinship disputes, especially between members of the same abusua, were a main cause of anxiety from which came accusations of witchcraft. A brother would not pay back a loan; a young man was fed by an uncle but who refused to return the duty through work; a man incurred the anger of kinsmen by giving his son 450 pounds sterling to buy a lorry; another

man constantly enraged family members through his arguments about money. The later was told that his kinsmen had "given him a river," meaning they had "implored the river-god to destroy him." These stories provide a context for the assertion that, "money and cocoa-farm inheritance are the commonest bones of contention." (Field: 1960, p. 115)

Busia argues that cocoa was so lucrative for so many people that it introduced elements of instability into the matrilineage. The lineage derived strength from the solidarity of siblings. A man often had closer ties to his sister than his own wife. Increases in wealth from new global markets brought a stronger sense of divesting this wealth to one's own children. As a result, ties between siblings and other matrikin became tenuous. Tensions strained relationships, and quarrels were manifest between a man's wives and his sisters who were the potential mothers of those who would inherit from him. (Busia: 1951, p. 127)

Tensions and envious attitudes over the prosperity of one member of the clan or lineage instead of another were often the basis of witchcraft suppositions. Financially successful men and women lived in fear of envious kinsmen who may inflict illness or calamity "by means of bad magic or witchcraft." (Field: 1960, p. 87) Conversely, unsuccessful lineage members were convinced that witchcraft and "envious malice is the cause of their failure."

In 1945, Meyer Fortes recorded an interview with an ɔkɔmfɔ, "one of the most prosperous men in the town." This interview provides a remarkable glimpse into the livelihood and wealth of this man. It also demonstrates that "within the abusua conflict may result in witchcraft accusations...There are conflicts, often due to envy, between educated and uneducated members of the same matrilineage." (Warren: 1974, pp. 127-128) Fortes

describes the ɔkɔmfɔ. "One does not have to talk long with him to know that he is a very shrewd business man. He speaks of his profession as if it were a sacred duty, but it is very obviously a highly profitable business." It also shows that this healer, like any other worker or professional, was not immune to kin accusations of witchcraft. Following his financial windfall as a healer, he took out mortgages on five homes and a cocoa farm. The properties were rented out to brothers and their sons. However, the kin were known to not pay their bills, and this resulted in contractual defaults. "In Ashanti," he said, "money is everything. If you have none you are nobody; if you have sika [gold] you are a man, and you can be proud." (MF: 1945b)

The fate of the brothers is not revealed; however, after telling of the defaults, the ɔkɔmfɔ gave an amazing confession about his own protection from witchcraft, and how these matters are found mostly among fellow members of an abusua.

> I first decided to get the medicine because I wanted to protect myself. [There are] not many people here who love me. Supposing I put on a cloth, people see and get jealous, wish one ill. I decided to get something that would protect me. If you are in a place where people's eyes are following you about everywhere you must be careful or you may die suddenly. I got this medicine to protect myself against evil people. (MF: 1945b)

Clark has shown how the growth in cocoa and rubber industries brought new opportunities to Asante in the early twentieth century. This financial boom, however, was gender oriented. Men, more than women, went beyond their former places in markets to take on the more lucrative jobs of planting, harvesting and selling cocoa and other global agricultural products. The push of men into the fields created a vacuum in the marketplace, one which was soon filled by women. Women became the new entrepreneurs within the

markets. Some were quite skilled and could make more money than others. (Clark: 1994)

The imbalance of income from new businesses between members of the same lineage has been shown to create tensions resulting in suspicion of witchcraft. Within this context of commodities and money, women were often either victims of witchcraft or were supposed to be witches. Symptoms were directly tied to the capacities of women as child bearers. Children perpetuated the future of the matrilineage. In no other areas of Asante life was witchcraft more pronounced than in the incapacities of women to bear children. Witches were known for their abilities to make women barren and men sterile. In the women's case, their wombs were believed to be turned upside down by a witch. A women may also become "awo ma wu, one who brings forth children for death, meaning the children all die prematurely in infancy." (Debrunner: 1961, p. 43) In other cases, young women were known to bring forth dead children, and thereby confessing they had eaten the child within the womb. Witches were also known to steal the womb of a fertile woman in order to use it for themselves. Suspicions of witchcraft among kinsmen show the centrality of the matrilineage in how these confessions and accusations were sometimes made. Sexuality, childbirth, fertility, and posterity were all part of a person's identity within the abusua. Barrenness and sterility, impotence and the death of children all were symptoms of witchcraft; and all of these were manifest within the matrilineage.

Power of the new shrines was imported from regions beyond Asante, for example Gonja or Wa, as it was assumed that such areas were more adept at containing the evil effects of witch. This implies a sense of ineptness of Asante traditional religion. In other words, by the time of the rise of Tigare, individual Asante contemplated a universe in

which several basic elements of religion and cosmology had remained from the past. Continuity of imagery and cosmological power, even through such radical change, demonstrates the resilient character of traditional Asante religion. But the imagery and meaning of these remnants had been forever altered.

What remained was a lingering imagery of difference between village and bush. The power of the wild was ubiquitous as a source of danger to human life. It continues to be such a source even until the present. Thus, as a young Asante male of 23 rehearsed some of the stories of Tigare he had learned from his father and uncle, the emphasis was on the display of knowledge found by the patient while entering the realm between village and bush.

> In olden times, someone could go into the bush. And there he finds something. This thing is very powerful. It will talk to you. It will discuss things with as you are talking to me. It will tell you what to do.
> And you must do it. You have no choice. If you do not do what it says, it can make you very sick. It can make you die.
> But if you do what it says, it will protect you. You will not be sick. You will not die. You will prosper. You will learn things.
> You will also know if someone else is a witch. The akɔmfoɔ will rub your eyes with leaves. He will change your eyes so you can see everything. You will be able to walk down the street and see if someone is a witch. You see his spirit. You see her spirit. Then when they see you, then they will run from you.
> But you must always do as it says. It will protect you.

The imagery of this recitation is similar to one given to Fortes in 1945. It is repeated here in order to provide a portrait of agency and experience of akɔmfoɔ within the context of witch finding as told autobiographically.

> My village is Nantan. I inherited my father's bonsam. My father's father was ɔkɔmfoɔ. I am not my father's eldest son. When my father was alive he loved me dearly. He, after every fetish dance (akɔm), would take the pad in which he carried the god (ɔbonsam) and put it on my head. Then he would give me spiritual bath after

he had spiritual bath.
Before I became a fetish priest (ɔkɔmfoɔ), I was a lorry driver. After my father's death, the spirit came upon me.
My god helps me to foresee events. If I put this charm (sumaŋ) which is in my hand under my pillow and sleep at night I see in dreams coming events. I knew before I came to Kumasi that there would be this interview. I dreamt last night that I was traveling in company of a white man.
My god communicates coming events to me during day time. I may sit with people and will hear him speaking to me as if by telephone. I hear him but they will not. He can tell me, "tomorrow is not a good day and so do not go out." Then I would keep in doors all that day. Again, he may tell me, "a bad person is coming to you."
If someone is going to die, I dream that he is dead.
If someone is ill and he wishes that I heal him, I fix medicine, give him bath [for] seven days and I give him some drink. (ASSM: MF, 1945h)

Interactions between akɔmfoɔ and abosom were themselves episodes of the creativity of power of a mystically generative sort. The dynamic between the two was characterized by both antipathy and tolerance, by mocking rage and periods of ritual negotiation. Johnson has made the same point in his description of Nuer divinities and their prophets. "Discussing the attributes of divinities and powers with Nuer cannot be done entirely in the abstract. The personalities of divinities are established by those who are seized by them." (Johnson: 1994, p. 281)

Because abosom were not part of culture they were noted for their natural tendencies to create conditions for humanity which were threatening and dangerous. Abosom were duplicitous, vengeful, and unpredictable in their capacities to threaten human existence. During the generations of monarchical control, abosom were capable of threats on the state, such as a defeat in battle or the death of an asantehene. In more recent periods, most often these tendencies were manifest among humans through illness, death, bareness, and financial ruin. As always, abosom controlled even greater forces of destruction. When

abosom refused to mediate such forces, sasabonsam or mmoatia revealed their basic contempt for humanity by encouraging and endorsing bayi. This power was directed at specific human persons, including akɔmfoɔ.

In a letter from 1934 to the District Commissioner at Kumasi, 13 Asante men from Kumawu provide details of four anti-witching shrines: Kopo, Tigare, Brao, and Nanwuro. Their report testifies that "these fetishes can catch a witch who would get up in the night to kill a person and it can catch and reveal a thief who steals another person's properties." The letter also outlined the various powers of these shrines in other matters of stress and anxiety. "These fetishes prevent miscarriages of our women and premature death of our people and [they] help our women to bring forth their children calmly and give childbirth to our barren women." The shrines also focused on the body and its potential for illness. "The most common sickness in this Division is epilepsy which frequently attacks our children; and these fetishes have stopped this sickness from coming upon our children." The shrines also "have the power to catch any person who intends to kill another person with a bad medicine so as to take possession of the of the deceased's cocoa farms and other properties." The shrines also contain capacity to determine fraud in modern cocoa trading and economies. "These fetishes can catch and reveal a person who defrauds another in monies or trade. As an example, if one sends money per a neighbor to buy him something that [is] worth about 10 pounds sterling and the party buys the thing for six or so, he reports that he buys it for 10 pounds which would be untrue, the medicine can catch the liar." (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61)

In such circumstances, the capacity for human and supernatural agency was

familiar among all Asante. The capacity for evil and misfortune by supernatural entities was always present. This capacity was most familiar through malfunctions of the body. Shrines were effective in treating illnesses. But shrines were also known for countering the frailties of human persons. Persons were capable of either witchcraft alliances or of contrary behaviors such as theft and adultery. In either case, they were resigned to ritual treatment through the fetish shrine.

> You go to the fetish priest with a kola which would be placed on the fetish and given back to you to chew. After you have finished eating the kola the laws of the fetish would be read to you; and if you dare to go against it's laws it will catch you and you will approach the fetish priest yourself and reveal all your misdeeds. The following fees shall then be claimed from you: a) in case of a witchcraft: 2.7 pounds; b) other petty matters 1.3 pounds. (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61)

The following list of such deeds is contained in a printed pamphlet handed to me by a man who had sworn allegiance to Tigare in Kumase.

1. Adherents must not swear by the cult.
2. Adherents must not tell any person that he or she is a wizard or witch.
3. Adherents must not be in possession of any poisonous or obnoxious medicine.
4. Adherents must not use charms to take away one another's wife.
5. Adherents must not steal.
6. Adherents must not mention anybody's name with malice when they are naked in the bathroom.
7. Adherents must not mention any person's name with malice on any highway as a result of a previous quarrel between them at home.
8. If any person's hen lays an egg in your house, do not take the egg or the hen but you must find out the owner and give it to him or her.
9. If you are hungry in the fields (bush) and you happen to be in a farm you may eat some of the crops in the farm but do not take any home. When you return home you may tell the owner. If you do not tell him and he asks you, do not deny it.
10. If you are alone on road and find a lost property call God to be your witness. If some other person wishes to claim it to be his property, do not deny having found the property. Always speak the truth.
11. A married woman adherent must not commit adultery.
12. Adherents must not cheat any person.
13. Adherents must not keep malice with any other person.

14. Adherents must not keep complaints in their hearts.
15. Adherents must not refuse anything such as food, gifts, etc., etc.
16. A married woman adherent must not refuse to sleep in her husband's room and must not remove her bedding from the room, on small pretext.
17. Adherents may give their family fetish or ghost when required to do so. But if the fetish or ghost wants the sheep or fowl for a witch on their behalf, they must not do it.
18. All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you do ye even so to them. (TP: n.d.)

Informants speak of drinking fetish with a particular shrine and a particular priest as being "tied." Persons must then do as the shrine requires through the priest; otherwise the abosom will seek vengeance because of the mockery inflicted upon it. This may mean illness or death for the person who has "drunken fetish." As one informant told me, someone goes to see akɔmfoɔ because of illness, or is seeking prosperity in life, or their life "needs improvement," or they need more money, or they wish to have a healthy baby or avoid death, or the desire a high position in work or in government, or they wish to have protection against witchcraft. The priest then "divines--something you don't understand--to find solutions to the problem." He then prepares medicine, aduro, for the person; and the person is expected to drink all the aduro. "This may make sickness leave, or may make prosperity come. But later, these may vanish." The person is then asked to bathe using a soap colored anything but red or black. These colors are symbolic of death, war, or other tragedy. But most importantly, "if ɔkɔmfoɔ tells you to do something, you should do it. You should not do the things he tells you not to do."

Conformity to the orders and prescriptions of shrines is reinforced in a note regarding subsequent calamity for a village in eastern Asante. The Dente shrine was linked to an abosom identified as Ba. In 1927, "Bruku (ɔkɔmfoɔ) said that if they [the villagers]

did not do as he had ordered and hold OBOSUM BA, then surely would OBOSUM BA destroy [the village of] MAKOKWAI...We were then told that at the end of the harvest we should have to brew beer and kill a sheep and make a yearly sacrifice...He then demanded four cows to pacify him." (NAG: A.D.M. 39/1/221)

This brief passage demonstrates the ominous powers of abosom and their powerful capacities. These were often manifest among humans through the deeds of witches. It also shows the capacity of witch catching shrines to control and suppress these powers. In the wake of witchcraft, a community could be laid to waste. Yet, this passage also demonstrates the absolute dominance of the shrines in their capacities to control effects of witches. The abosom prescribes the ritual and sacrificial treatment necessary for countering witchcraft. If these are not followed, the community could be devastated by its might. We have seen in this chapter how dance, songs, sacrifice, and other ritual elements serve to enact and engage the power of shrines so that witch finding may be effective.

Historically, shrines such as Senya Gupo and Tigare continued into the 1940s, when the British government shifted from attempts to suppress the cults. They saw, rather, the medicinal qualities contained in the cults as forms of local medicine. Diviners and herbalists which presided at witch finding rituals were required to be licensed by the state in order to practice medicine. By 1945, the cults had abandoned any public display of political resistance to foreign powers--or to local level authority in Asante. They concentrated instead on aspects of health; and many healers built up a clientele according to their renown and effectiveness to heal. However, it was the cultural and historical atmosphere of anxiety and discontinuity which continued to breath life into the cults for

nearly six decades.

Emphasis on healing by divination and by herbal medicine has prompted the perpetuity of Tigare until the present day. Tigare shrines and their priests now reside mostly in rural areas around Kumase and Cape Coast. Tigare attendance has risen slightly in the last ten years; but it suffered a sudden set back in the 1960s with the dramatic rise of prophetic healers and healing churches throughout Ghana. Also, widespread conversion to formal and independent Christian churches has resulted in fewer people showing devotion to either healing churches or witch finding shrines. As one informant told me, "Tigare is not found in the cities. You have to go out to the villages where maybe a few elders practice. It is something our grandparents did. But now there are too many churches — churches everywhere, especially Christian churches." Another young man told me, "I learned a little bit about akɔmfoɔ and abosom in school."

During the colonial era, the content and powers of witch finding cults in Asante and other Akan regions were certainly not understandable by a singular explanation. The cults assumed a multifarious character. To persons who suffered within kin relations, the cults assumed a sense of justice against a growing number of injustices: theft, cursing, inability to bare children, adultery, and envy. For others seeking financial gain, the cults offered a means for prosperity. They signaled an ability to present individuals as new or modern persons, blessed with the symbols and adornments of a growing sense of wealth and economic prosperity. The shrines also represented protection against failure, loss, ruin, and destruction in a personal and economic sense. To persons afflicted with illnesses of various kinds, the cults were a medium for healing. The cults of this era were certainly many things

to many people. During the colonial period, especially after the first two decades of the twentieth century, the cults achieved a distinctive mark of modernity which had made its everlasting mark in Asante culture as well as throughout the Gold Coast.

In this chapter, I have given a history of the rise, development and flourishing of witch finding movements in the Gold Coast Colony and the years prior to the annexation of Asante. I have emphasized the historicity and historical nature of witchcraft. Data have shown that witch finding cults and their ritual attendant priests pre-date colonialism, and that these cults assumed distinct religious, medical and political dimensions as a result of state and moral crises within the mid to late nineteenth century. The political dimension continued in cults into the twentieth century. However, the cults then began to emphasize religious and ritual healing more than direct political confrontation. Nevertheless, the creativity of power remained within the capacities of cult priests, cult members and abosom throughout the entire period of study.

This chapter also demonstrated how witchcraft involved threats to the personhood and individual Asante, how witchcraft seized upon an individual notion of fate and, and how witchcraft powers harm the constituent elements of the person. Notions of healing and illness contain similar aspects of the person throughout much of tropical Africa. Finally, the data has intended to show how the agency of cult members and priests has been a constituent aspect of witch finding from nascent period in the late 1870s.

Chapter five will present a brief history of the political and legal struggles within colonial courts which cult members and priests experienced during the British period of overrule. Chapter five is intended to provide a context for British action to limit the cult

performances and the spread of healing shrines.

Chapter V

The Empire Strikes Back:

Legislative Attempts to Restrict Witchcraft and Witch Finding

## 5.1 Introduction

In chapter four, histories were given of the development of witch finding cults in Asante during a period of nearly seven decades, 1879-1945. Historical details allowed for presentation of a central theme of this thesis. The antiquity of witch finding pre dates colonialism; moreover, the fluid character of the cults provides evidence of how they changed in response to the political and economic developments of the times.

Witch finding and witch cleansing were equally emphasized. Also, witch finding was shown to be situated within a larger religious concern with abosom and other spirit agents and powers of the bush.

Chapter four also shows how the human body, with its incumbent illnesses and frailties, was generally the focus of both witch finding and the effects of witches. Although witch finding regularly addressed a wide range of themes of the modern world, such as the success and failures with riches and material goods, it most often pursued attempts to heal and to bring health to the body. Thus, Asante witch finding centers upon the body's inescapable tendency to "be the subject of sensation, experience, and world" (Csordas: 1994, p. 8) for a human person. In so doing, the cults demonstrate the body's capacity for signifying various features of Asante personhood in pre and post colonial times. This is because the body in Asante, as is the case for many peoples in Africa, provides

symbolic meaning to the covert or private sector of life. This sector includes the domain of healing, of ritual and myth, of poetry, dance, song, and expressive arts. All of these areas of life pertain directly to the human body; but they also include allusions to social relations.

> The covert idiom preferred to express emotion is the inarticulate discourse pertaining to the body. In particular, it is the inside of the body that represents the emotional dimensions of existence. The heart, the liver, the womb, the blood and the other body fluids are the chief metaphors of emotional qualities — whether these refer to witchcraft and sorcery, or to miraculous capacities, charismatic power, contagious infections, love, anger, or symbiotic communion. (Jacobson-Widding: 1991, p. 20)

To understand these themes in Asante, it is necessary to comprehend how witch finding movements were attempts to manage the body during periods of anxiety, discontinuity and danger. All of these disruptions in Asante history were also perceived as malfunctions of the human body. Such themes were pursued in chapter four. In addition, it is important to comprehend the political climate in which such attempts were being made. As noted by Geschiere, "witchcraft discourse apparently follows a modernization process of its own." (Geschiere: 1994, p. 323)

The present chapter explores British colonial maneuvers to regulate and legislate witch finding cults, along with their ritual practices. Data will show how the cults were regarded as an assault on British sensibilities of morality and propriety. Data will also demonstrate attempts to prosecute witch finders in the courts according to a limited number of statutes under British common law. This chapter will also show the difficulty the colonial courts had in prosecuting suspected witch finding priests and shrine participants. During this period, 1897-1945, the historicity of witch finding cults continues to demonstrate conditions of Asante personhood and agency.

## 5.2 British Overrule

In December of 1927, a group of Asante men from Kumase, citizens of the Empire, wrote a letter concerning the "Great Oath of Asante." They signed themselves collectively as "The Eyes and Ears of Government." The letter contained a brief plea concerning the Oath and their desires to swear to its allegiance. In particular, they protested British attempts to suppress the Oath.

> Since Government [British] has mentioned that the Great Oath should be abolished, all the inhabitants and villagers used to hold private meetings in a very critical manner behind the Old Cemetery, for which we are afraid it will probably bring more trouble in the future if Government is emphatically insisting upon abolishing same. Even they once approached Nana Prempeh [King of Asante, 1887-1896] and asked him to give his opinion about what Government is doing against Kumasi District. Nana Prempeh replied to them, "Government is our Mother; and if she is claiming something from her children and they are not satisfied with it, they should simply petition through some Noble man whose intercession will be more effective but not to quarrel with her. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/1352)

Political conditions of Asante in 1927 are evident in this paragraph. The Gold Coast, like most other British colonies in Africa was regulated through a system of indirect rule. Local political figureheads were allowed to conduct and mediate low level relations and disputes. However, the European presence demanded that ultimate legal and political measures be exacted by a colonial governor, who was in turn responsible to a set of European laws and regulations which were mandated in the colony. These laws were upheld by a hierarchical set of European and local officials whose jobs included overseeing illegal and unwanted behavior and events. Local communities were responsible to these officials and their rules in the letter of the law. A major goal of indirect rule was to suppress disorder of whatever sort; and this was done within communities who were not uniformly

pleased with the results. Thus, the above group wished a resurgence of certain points of identity such as the Great Oath: "Their Soul is in it as It is in the Gold Stool." The Oath demonstrates the centrality of the Golden Stool as a symbol of spiritual essence of the state and of all Asante. It originated with Osei Tutu; and its abilities to define Asante ethnicity continued until colonialism. However, British administration found this Oath to be counter to its own purposes, and thus had it banned. Nevertheless, connections between the Oath and the Golden Stool inspired a persistence of ethnicity even until Independence in 1957. (Allman: 1993, p. 3-15)

Financing was often the engine which drove such political machinery. Whereas large scale military engagement was often required for conquest, it was soon realized that such numbers were both unnecessary and costly for continuation of the colonies. Thus, while colonies were first formed through the might of gun barrels, they were routinized year to year by hiring local employees as their bureaucratic agents. Both methods were ultimately effective in annexing political authority.

Negotiation for power, however, was never entirely absent. It reoccurred at macro levels of pleadings to magistrates and the governor. It happened more often at micro levels by defiance of regulations and by resistance to administrative rule. Colonial officials often seemed to never be satisfied with their influence in hand over the lives of Africans. As a result, colonialism in Africa presented itself on several fronts of contestation. Thus, "complex interests of politics, religion, and trade intertwined. For differing reasons, members of the British public demanded conquest; and they got it." (Fields: 1985, p. 28) In no other area of local life was this fact more apparent than in attempts to control and regulate

witchcraft and witch finding. Such attempts began even before the conquest of Asante.

**5.3 Orders in Council, 1906-1930: "A Grave Danger to Society"**

The first administrative regulation which recognized witch finding came in 1906. The regulation was aimed directly at a little known shrine named yi abeyi, which clearly has reference to the Twi word for witchcraft, bayi or baye.

> Prosecutions are now taking place where necessary under the Order in Council of 1st June, 1906 in which judging from the perusal of Gazette No. 36 of 1906 it would be seen that the practice of finding out witches under the custom known as yi abeyi or whatever other name it is known, has been prohibited. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

This Order was issued one year previous to the recorded spread of Aberewa. However, it is likely that some forms of the cult were known in various parts of Asante region. Aberewa was officially suppressed in 1908; but that was not the first administrative action opposing the practices of witch finding cults. The Order of 1906 was to be revoked in 1930 by a more comprehensive regulation of witch finding.

One of the first recorded attempts to prosecute witch finding under the colonial criminal code was in 1907. F.C. Fuller, Chief Commissioner in Kumase, noted the spread of witch finding movements within Kumase and throughout the region. Fuller's letter begins by stating that an earlier defendant was dismissed for lack of evidence; however, the status of akɔmfoɔ as precarious with the British from the beginning. Payments made to the priests on assumptions of healing and witch detecting appeared to the British as nothing other than extortion. Fuller confessed what was to become a dilemma for magistrates and judges within the colonial courts. "I cannot help thinking that the bringing of false accusations, especially by Fetish Priests, should be rendered a criminal offense."

Fuller believed the importation of European social institutions of church and state would gradually lead to the decline of mysticism and witch finding and to the rise of civilization. British common sense and rationality could only expose such schemes to the light of day. Eventually, supposed Fuller, the entire lucrative efforts of shrine priests would fade away.

> Owing to the gradual infiltration of new ideas and progressive trends of European rule, the Fetish Priests are beginning to experience a diminution of power, as is but natural. It is not difficult to foresee, however, that they will make every effort to retain ascendency over the people and their hands will be immeasurably strengthened if they find that they can bring false accusation against sceptics with impunity. For this reason, I would urge that this pastime be rendered punishable. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/10)

Fuller's intolerance of witch finding shrines was fueled just three weeks earlier on November 2nd when a shrine priest allegedly accused a young Asante of causing three deaths while the man was visiting the shrine. The name of the shrine is not mentioned. However, the date suggests Aberewa or Kunde. In an unusual move, the young man appealed the accusations to the local native courts where he was tried and condemned to pay a heavy fine for the deaths. At this point, the man appealed to Fuller in an attempt to clear his name and release himself from any obligations of debt. Fuller's office investigated the crime, and no proof was found of any wrong doing. The fine was waived, and the man, Kudjo Tufuo, held no further obligations to the priest or to the local court. However, Fuller insisted that the accusations of the priest represented foul play in the form of extortion. His letter to the Solicitor General at Sekondi appealed for legal action against such attempts at making money.

> The point I now wish to be advised upon is this, whether the Fetish Priest cannot be

> proceeded against for bringing such a serious accusation on futile grounds! It must be remembered that the evidence of a "Fetish man" is, in native eyes, well nigh incontrovertible and it were unwise not to try and make that body of scientists realize that false accusation is a dangerous proceeding. (NAG: A.D.M 11/1/10)

The most prevalent concern for suppressing the active use of shrines in the practice of witch finding was the suspicion that most shrine priests were involved in extortion of money from their clients. Other reasons arose later. These involved suspected killings, thefts, and black mail. However, most of these concerns did not surface until the appearance of hwe me so in 1921.

Apparently some shrines were either more public than others, or were more involved in money transactions. In the case of the later, the use of money for payment of ritual or for mystical forms of healing was nearly universally considered as extortion. Thus, while aberewa is vigorously opposed by the British in 1908, and is suspected of resurfacing under the guise of hwe me so over a decade later, very little administrative attention is given to other shrines such as kunde. Some of these survived whatever government forms of regulation, even without changing their names or significant locations, well beyond 1945.

An exchange of letters between Fante chief Appia Nuama and A. H. L. Richter, District Commissioner at Cape Coast in 1908 demonstrates conditions of overrule under which all new subjects of the Empire labored in regards to shrine practices. Richter had received word of two men who were seriously ill "in consequence of the abominable practices of the priests of Aberewa." The chief was informed that should the men die their bodies were to be transported to Cape Coast for autopsy. He was reminded that Aberewa was now illegal in the Colony and that "Aberewa fetish worship shall forthwith cease." A

third letter to the chief stated that Richter had "encountered the Aberewa fetish in several of your villages, which shows me that this pernicious practice is wide spreading and increasing in influence." Letter number four reminded that chief that "the fetish Aberewa is now prohibited by law, and henceforward anyone found guilty of being engaged in this worship will render himself liable to severe punishment."

Finally, after this threatening volley, the chief responded to conditions of Aberewa shrine practices in the Fante villages near Cape Coast. He outlined the fundamental purposes of Aberewa, and stated that its uses were not contrary to any law. Moreover, said the chief, the practices of Aberewa provided great benefits and medicinal protection for those who engaged in its strict guidance. The early letters regarding Aberewa demonstrate how persons contested the new law by continuing to act in a manner contrary to the British even though their actions were obviously punishable by Colonial law.

> Your poor and humble servant begs to lay this before your worship and to state that I went to Cape Coast for some case. I spent about a year and some months and when I returned to my place I saw my people have brought some thing by name Abiriwah, and as I do not understand the meaning of it I called on my headmen to Yankumasi where I am staying. I questioned the people that brought Abiriwah to my place. They explained to me that it is a thing that prevents bad sickness or allows women to conceive freely and born free and also stops devils from doing bad to their friends when they conceive, and also stops devils to not spoil their friends farm. It stops a wicked person not to kill his friend when he is alone walking on the road; also stops tiger not to kill sheep, fowl, or anything which a person has for his living. It is a fact when this Abiriwah was brought to my place [village] women now do conceive free and born [give birth] free. Cocoa farming, or any kind of farm, sheep nursing, fowl or animals all going on well in my place here than before time. People don't die so many as last because people [don't] have bad medicine to spoil their friends as well as devils now are all stopped. There is no robbery in my place as before; and for this reason with myself and headmen have agreed this Abiriwah may use it in my place just to prevent bad people that will bring bad medicine to spoil my people. This Abiriwah, when a person drinks some and wash some, the party is at liberty to be a member of the [Christian] Church in anywhere. It doesn't hate school going at all.

I have the honor to be your obedient servant. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/213)

Even though the chief's testimonial was convincing, Richter remained loyal in this duty to execute colonial law. His response one week later reiterated the illegality of Aberewa, and that it was unacceptable under any conditions. He provided the chief a week in order to rid the villages of all evidence of the shrine; otherwise, "everything connected with the Fetish will be destroyed and everybody concerned will be liable to a penalty of 25 pounds according to the ordinance." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/213)

The longevity of such shrines was strictly contrary to predictions given by Charles Harper in 1923. Two months after Governor Guggisberg signed the Order in Council 21 making witch finding under the name of Hwe me so a crime in the Colony, Harper stated that, "what we wish to stop is the practice of the fetish...I do not consider it necessary at this stage at any rate to destroy the fetish or to "hunt" the fetish. I am inclined to think it will die out naturally when they realize that the Government regards it with dishonor." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/10) However inaccurate Harper may have been in his assessment of local custom, he did hold out the belief that prosecutions would likely be necessary for those violating the Order.

That very month from Kumase, Harper reiterated in his own decree what had been ordained by Governor Guggisberg from Accra. The Chief Commissioner of Asante issued his own order of suppression on February 26th. This, he said, followed the Native Customs Ordinance of 1908 which had outlawed Aberewa.

> The celebration of any customs, rites or ceremonies connected with the worship of the Fetish variously known as Hwemesu, Brahua, Nframa, Kweku (or howsoever the said fetish may be styled or known) is hereby prohibited. Whoever contravenes the

above order shall be liable to a term of imprisonment with or without hard labor not exceeding three months, or a fine not exceeding twenty five pounds. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/10)

A similar case came to the attention of W. Fell of the Chief Commissioner's Office in Kumase in 1912. Fell recounted the story of T. N. Ofosu of the Basel Mission who witnessed an "ancient Fetish custom" in Wenchi and Nkoranza. The custom referred to "necessitated the murder of every ninth child of the same mother at birth." Fell noted the case of Efua Wirichi of Droboso, whose child was killed. Fell himself investigated the story, and was led to the village and spoke with the mother and the shrine priest, a woman named Ekua Num. She confessed her alliance with another priest, Kofi Nyami. Fell had them both arrested. He visited the house of Nofi Nyami and "destroyed a number of fetishes and the family fetish stools, and ordered the destruction of the house." The following day, Fell also ordered the destruction of the home of Ekua Num which was "the center of these brutalities." The order, he noted, "was duly carried out."

The evidence against the two women was strong. Upon their own confessions, they had admitted murder of the child. Adjoining evidence was gathered by the village omanhene, who explained the custom known as nkroma. He said,

> It is said our ancestors came out of a hole in the ground. One Nkroma first came out from the ground. He stood aside and saw many people coming from the hole. He saw so many he shouted, "too many are coming," and when they heard it they were alarmed and the majority returned into the ground. It was then determined as he frightened them back there should never be an "Nkroma" in their country. Since then the ninth child has to be killed. The carrying out of this custom has always been in the hands of one family, of whom Kofi Nyami and Ekua Num are the representatives. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

The mother was called upon to give her account in fuller detail. She claimed

that upon discovering she was pregnant with her ninth child, she was "sent to the bush." The delivery was accomplished with no other assistance than two or her children. She was later instructed by her husband to not give the baby to anyone for the ritual killing. Efua Wirichi then denied her earlier confession, and explained that the baby did not die by murder. Instead, it died "naturally. It put its finger in its own mouth, cried and died." After the death, Efua had the child buried

Upon hearing the recanting of her story, Fell admitted that "it would be impossible now to prove whether the child died naturally as the mother says, or whether the mother killed it." He then claimed that the shrine priests were responsible for influencing their clients into silence in order to save them from the perils of prosecution and imprisonment. An exasperated Fell then reflected on Asante culture which prompted such acts.

> We must consider the social status of the people, the pitch to which their culture now arrived and the fact that they have been practicing a recognized tradition of their ancestors, brutal as it was. If they could give sufficient guarantees that the custom would permanently be dropped I should be inclined to take no more action as regards them. All the chiefs and ten captains swore on their Fetish stool to abolish the custom or to lose their lives. There was little or no opposition to the destruction of Adantasi village, or the jujus, and you may think that enough has been initially done. The lesson I have given has been severe and I know has been keenly felt. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

Convinced that the crime originated with the mystical powers of the fetish priest, and inspired by his earlier abilities to destroy what was presumed to be the scene of the murder, Fell spoke publically with several chiefs in the area. He warned them that any future occurrence of such crimes would result in the destruction of the entire village, and that "every stool and fetish that can be found" would be burned. Moreover, anyone knowing of

such a crime may be considered as an accessary to murder. Fell seemed certain that his actions and threats were convincing. "Mothers may now conceive their child with pride and joy and may look forward to bringing up that child into a fine man or woman without the slightest fear of any Fetish or any inhuman and brutal murder of their child."

For all the warnings and correspondences issued by district commissioners and other colonial officials concerning the performances of Aberewa, Kunde, and other shrine rituals, the official voice of the Empire appeared to be little more than rattling of sabers. In many instances, there was simply a lack of evidence to convict persons of the crimes with which they were accused. Autopsies were performed. But only in rare occasions did the body yield sufficient proof of fowl play. Moreover, the magnanimous claims of mass murders by certain self-confessed witches were simply to complex for the British to investigate. One official claimed, for example, to have overheard the confession to murder of over 150 persons during a performance of Hwe me so. However, he could not say later if the confessor was of a "sound mind," since the tale was uttered during ritual and ceremonial drinking.

The British could not readily confirm what was reality and what was mere allegation in practices of either witchcraft or witch finding. Because of this, many English held widely diverging opinions on what should be done regarding witch finding performances. Few administrators ever encountered the effects of witchcraft. Even fewer confronted a supposed witch. Yet the evidences of witch finding after the times of Aberewa were rampant. Beginning with the suppression of Aberewa in 1908, a flurry of reports surfaced concerning citing various offenses attributable to witch finding cults.

Under stories of homicide and violence, Governor Guggisberg was pressured to act in opposition. The government also received constant requests from the Methodists, the Presbyterians and the Catholic clergy for immediate sanction to suppress all forms of witchcraft, which they, of course, considered illegitimate mystical activity. A report of a subcommittee appointed by the Gold Coast Christian Council outlines the opposition of the Christian churches to witch finding cults. This report was offered as an official pronouncement on the missionary position concerning witchcraft. It was written after Order in Council 28 of 1930. This Order was to be the last official pronouncement from the Governor regarding witch finding.

The Council report states that the powers possessed by a witch include the following:

> A. The power of self transformation into a beast or a bird (not into another human being), sometimes called by scientists, zoanthropy.
> B. The power to inflict disease and death upon a human victim without physical contact or physical medium (popular belief distinguishes between witchcraft and poisoning.)
> C. The power of "supernatural" flight through the air, either invisibly or in the form of a ball of light (compare Jack-o-Lantern, ignis fatuus, Will-o-the-wisp.)
> D. The power of "eating" an object (e.g. a pawpaw), without touching it, at a distance.
> E. The power of causing worldly prosperity or adversity, by means (it would appear) of "spiritual" (non-material) action upon the "spirit" of the money or the goods. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

The report continues by describing the intervention of a witch finder arises at meetings of "non-material groups." At these meetings, witch finders identify "a victim." The Council correctly stated, "the power of a witch is limited to the members of her own family, and that therefore no witch outside the family can do any harm to the family except

through the co-operation of a witch inside the family." The report also correctly stated that a significant power of witch finders was the "power of healing physical diseases." Remarkably, the group was divided on a rational dismissal of the efficacy and reality of witchcraft. However, agree with the reality of witchcraft or not, the entire group set out to persuade their congregations and the government that witch finding of any sort should be banned.

Observation indicated to the Council that witchcraft was "of two kinds." One was practiced "for the purpose of acquiring wealth." The other was performed "for the purpose of harming or destroying human life." Witchcraft was stated as being mostly hereditary, but it could also be acquired. The witch finder, on the other hand, assumes his or her craft by purchasing the medicines necessary for healing and for detecting witches.

The Council was not of unanimous opinion that all facts surrounding witchcraft and witch finding stories were total fabrications. "Some of us take that view. Some of us do not. But we are unanimously of the opinion that many witchcraft stories have no basis in fact." As a result, the Council condemned the practices of witch finding. "We unanimously deplore that fact that large numbers of Christian people remain under the domination of the fear of witchcraft." A Christian vocabulary of local concepts and customs reinforced the condemnation. Meyer notes how local terms such as abosom were translated into English as "Devil" or evil. Missionaries in the Volta region "understood the Ewe religion as a work of the Devil." (Meyer: 1992, p. 105)

The terror of witchcraft, according to the Council, was generated by the private and mercenary intentions of the witch finders. The Council considered shrine priests

to be opportunists who prognosticated illness and prescribed medicines under a charade of superstitious fraud. "It is our conviction that unscrupulous persons often take advantage of the prevailing belief, to acquire notoriety and importance by pretending to possess powers which in fact they do not possess." The official view of the Council concerning akɔmfɔ was that they were perpetrators of fraud and extortion. They were therefore considered to be capable of crimes as noted under the laws of the Colony. The following entry conveys this attitude.

> It is our conviction that whatever be the truth about witchcraft, the person who stands to gain most by the continuances of the belief is the witch doctor. In one sense we hold that in the present state of public opinion the witch doctor is more dangerous than the witch. His power to terrorize the weak minded; his power to suggest to unbalanced persons that they are themselves witches, when as a matter of fact they are as innocent in this respect as the members of this Council; his power to create or intensify an atmosphere of suspicion and malice; these are powers which make him a grave danger to society. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

Hostility at the supposed fraud and at the irrationality of witchcraft is clearly conveyed in this paragraph. Their purposes were self evident to all clergy: expose the witch finders, and bring them to justice under the law. For reasons of alienation of the flock and of suspicion of fraud, the Council recommended that all relevant laws concerning witchcraft be fully enforced. The Council also routinely reminded all members of their various parishes that:

> 1. Witch finding, as it is practiced, is as much of the devil as witchcraft .
> 2. The practice of witch finding is liable at any moment to inflict cruel wrongs upon perfectly innocent people.
> 3. In this matter Government is following the example of all civilized peoples with the sole desire of saving the innocent from the gravest wrong.
> 4. No power, not though it were the power of the devil himself and all his angels, shall be able to pluck us out of our Father's hands. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

By the time this document was authored, the churches had amassed a significant political force in the Colony. Sheer numbers of converts in some areas, especially along the coast, allowed the churches a significant voice in the political workings of local communities and within the state. Their persuasion in political matters was coupled with the influence of a number of district officials. Political alignments of colonial officers and mission clergy became an effective means of persuasion with the central government in Accra. Methodists and Presbyterians soon learned the practical language of political control. In particular, differences between congregation and non Christian populations were interpreted by clergy as affronts of church and law. When these offenses included the rites of witch finding shrines and priests, details were often dispatched to a political authority known to be sympathetic with the church. A District Commissioner's 1922 quarterly report from eastern Asante thus included a note of how Hwe me so was disrupting the local Methodist mission.

> The creator of this Fetish is rumored to be in Ashanti at the moment. Apparently, as most of the villages have now been supplied with shrines at a cost of some 400 pounds each he has done very well out of it. Further he goes on tour to the various shrines examining the evil smelling mixture which serves as the medicine and then pronounces it to be losing its strength. This he replenishes at a cost of about 80 pounds a time. The money this man has made out of the credulity of the people must be enormous...In some villages the shrine is built a few yards from the local Mission Church and enters into competition with the service there. Cases have been reported where the Christians have been unable to hold their services owing to the noise of the drums and shouting of the HWE MI SU followers. Sundays and Fridays are Hwe Mi Su days. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/11/452)

The report was read in all districts where shrines were active. By 1922, shrines such as Hwe me so were considered as threats to Christian missions. Opposition to the shrines by clergy had reached Accra. The voice of this opposition often followed the

indirect route of district officials. Thus, in August, 1922, J.L. Atterbury, D.C. for the Central Province wrote of Hwe me so: "There are indications that this fetish is against public morality and if allowed to continue, it may attract to itself members of the various Christian Missionary bodies." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/11/452) By the end of the year, the Governor in Accra became convinced of the criminal offensiveness of witch finding. In December, 1922, the Governor issued an Order in Council making suppression of the predominant Hwe me so "fetish" shrine a crime against the state

The same sentiments were reinforced in a 1927 letter to the Colonial Secretary in Accra. While some in government identified the criminal content of witch finding cults, others opposed them on moral grounds. The cults were considered to contend with the virtues of Christianity; or they were found counter-productive to the civilizing purposes of the Empire. On both grounds, some members of government labeled them as "evil," an irony which was not lost on many of the witch finders and village chiefs. Written by J.E. Graham Williams, the letter urges further legal actions against witch finding in the Gold Coast. Such actions would presumably drive the cults from the Colony.

> I really believe that the people in West Africa are ready to accept a mild form of the witchcraft suppression ordinance which has been in vogue in South and Central Africa for some years with the consequence that fetish cases there are exceptionally rare.
> There is not the slightest doubt that fetishism in West Africa has an evil influence upon the people, and is the cause of a great deal of drunkenness and crime among the elders. These fetish people are openly antagonistic towards missionaries and such life, and secretly towards white administration.
> As an individual living and working among these people, I had a great opportunity of viewing the inner conditions of their lives as they exist; and I do not exaggerate when I say that these conditions — that is, the true conditions — were very terrifying even to a man seasoned to native customs.
> If these cases are winked at in the smallest way by colonial authorities the native is

apt — alas only too often to misinterpret it as an expression of weakness, and only encourages him to further excesses — and, in effect, the native of West Africa is no different to the majority of natives in Africa. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/952) .

This approach contrasts with other officers who thought that condemning the cults would make them more believable and powerful in the minds of their devotees. The effects of the 1922 Order, however, were negligible in many areas of the Colony. During the 1920s, shrines thrived throughout the interior. Strong evidence of this expansion is particularly evident in Asante, Akim, Akuapem, and Techiman. Some high profiled shrines, such as Hwe me so and Aberewa, began to decline in urban areas like Kumase. Those in rural areas, however, continued with enthusiasm. Other shrines, such as Kunde and Tigare, were scarcely effected by the Order. Because shrines such as Tigare had expanded their mode of operation, and because other shrines such as Senya Gupo remained almost unchanged by any previous legislation, another Order was issued in 1930. This Order did not list any shrine by name. Instead, the new Order rescinded all previous legislation regarding witch finding. The wording is provided here as an example of the last law written in the Colony concerning witchcraft.

Order in Council
Order No. 28 of 1930

Whereas it appears to the Governor in Council that the practice of witch or wizard finding is harmful:
Now therefore by virtue and in exercise of the power in that behalf vested in the Governor in Council, by paragraph (1) of section fourteen of the Native Customs Ordinance, His Excellency is pleased by and with the advice of the Executive Council, to order and it is hereby ordered as follows:
1. This order may be cited as the Native Customs (Witch and Wizard finding) Order 1930.
2. The practice of witch or wizard finding and any ceremony connected therewith shall be prohibited and any person taking part by instigating any person to take part in any such ceremony shall be liable to a fine not exceeding twenty-five pounds.

3. The Order in Council made under the statutory authority aforesaid on the first day of June, 1906, shall be revoked.
Made by the Governor in Council this 19th day of December, 1930. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1/10)

(Signed) L. W. Wood,
Acting Clerk of the Executive Council

Wording of the law was intended to be comprehensive in scope for all shrines. The Order was issued with great hopes. Many in the administration and in the clergy expected an act of state would serve to cease any future practices of witch finding in the Gold Coast. They were all soon to find out that these expectations could never be fully realized. Five years after the 1930 Order, some areas of Asante showed little or not effects of legislating the cults. The proliferations of witch finding ceremonies and their accompanying paraphernalia inspired the Asante District Rule no. 1 of 1936. This was intended as supportive legislation. It was aimed at the materials devices found in shrine covens and sacred grounds.

> No person or persons residing within the area of Wenchi Native Authority shall have in his or their possession or shall have to prepare for or to receive by any other person or persons also residing within the area of such Native Authority any noxious medicine or offensive juju or jujus called "Gbanagba" or by any other name or names which consisting of: padlocks, needles, hooks, mirrors, dolls, wax candles, face powder, lavender water, scissors, whistles, note books with pencils, blue, small wooden coffins wrapped up in linen, knives, small brass pans, animal tails of medicine handles, medicine made up in small balls and black powder and wire cords, etc., with intent to use such medicine and juju or juju to endanger or destroy human life.
> Any person or persons convicted of the contravening of these Rules shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding 10 pounds or imprisonment with or without hard labor for three months and such medicine, juju or jujus should be brought up for destruction. (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61)

**5.4 Appeals and Negotiations: Structure and Oppositions**

This chapter has reviewed the historical materials found in the National

Archives of Ghana concerning imposition of British legal rules on practices of witch finding from 1906 to 1930. History of colonialism in Africa may consider regulations such as these a principle aspect of British presence in West Africa during the twentieth century. Yet to observe local Asante reactions to such regulations without understanding the omnipresent possibilities of mystical harm as a dimension of life would limit our comprehension of aspects of negotiations and struggles, of personhood and the creativity of power. It may be possible to describe this set of relations between ruler and ruled in terms of rational and legalistic strictures to which local populations more or less complied. The infusion of foreign rule and conflict within micro political machinery would thereby be the important story. Such description would consider the supernatural realm of Asante to be a secondary addendum. Dangers introduced from this dimension would thus be considered as results of competitions and coercions of political economy of colonialism. It is one way of representing the data. But such a picture excludes from view the creativity of power and the intentions of human persons. Such elements are essential in a description of witchcraft and witch finding in West Africa.

These aspects of life surround contexts of mystical actions in Africa. A husband suddenly falls ill. A cocoa crop fails. A cocoa crop booms when others fail. A child develops symptoms of a disease which is visiting nearby communities. A drought claims a harvest. A new bride cannot conceive. A new business does not survive the catastrophic destruction which the weather wrecks on its machinery. A second or third wife dies unexpectedly. An adulterous spouse dies from disease after her actions are discovered. An epidemic claims the lives of several villagers.

All such events had certain cultural meanings in the social world of Asante during the period in question. These meanings remained after colonialism in rural regions and among many urban dwellers of Kumase. To the British, such events were random occurrences with little or no meaning attached. It seemed ridiculous, therefore, that any supposition of such events could be shrouded in a mystical context. The rational mind of a Victorian Englishman could not even conceive of witchcraft having a place in someone else's existence. Thus, in June of 1930, J. de Hart, Attorney General of the Colony, wrote:

> Even in the native mind witchcraft cannot be defined, and as there is no definition for it how can it possibly be proved in a Native Court? What happens therefore? The "witch" is eventually deluded by incantations offered up by the fetish priest (for a consideration) and comes forward to confess her guilt. She is always of a mentally unbalanced type, and has suffered probably for years from a form of delusional insanity. These people are more suitable to a mental institution than to a Native Tribunal prison. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

Sally Falk Moore finds a continuation of this logic in anthropology by pointing out that explanations of witchcraft accusations have been overly concerned with their rationality, and with making sense of them in a rational and Western frame of reference. As a result, many subtle details of peoples lives and their intentions in such matters have gone unnoticed. (Moore: 1986, p. 50) The witchcraft of Jean of Arc and of Salem, for example, seems out of place in an African world. Moore suggests that "harm doing" or "harm threatening," although awkward phrases, represent a clearer image of witchcraft concerns in northern Tanzania.

Harm doing, especially threats to the body, were attributed to mystical causes in Asante history. This belief continues today. As we have seen, selling and control of medicines through shrine rituals was a lucrative business. Supposition of mystical harm was

never an issue of retrospective finger pointing invoked to assign blame at times of unexplained misfortune. Indeed, most Asante never shared the rationality of illness cause and effect and of the body which was being imposed upon them.

Thus, the concept of the "reasonable man" in English common law was difficult, often impossible, to apply in situations of witch finding in the colonies. How a reasonable Englishman might respond was entirely different than how a reasonable Asante might react. Yet the imposition of colonial legal rules, as defined in chapter three above, demonstrates the attempt to apply one set of social and legal conditions. At times, attempts to impose such laws seemed outrageous and absurd even to the British. In cases of alleged homicide, for example, some persons claimed that shrine medicines compelled them to confess to the murders of hundreds of people. As E.A. Penno noted in 1922, "As an example of the absurdity of some of the confessions I may say that during one of my visits one woman stated that she had brought about the death of no fewer than hundred and fifty persons. The chief himself mentioned this case to me as proof of Brewua's [shrine] power."

The structure and imposition of the law concerning witch finding thus helps to provide additional insight into Asante personhood. Negotiations between the government and chiefs and healers provide a context for the demonstration of Asante contestation of authority under colonial rule. In addition, sustained performances of witch finding rites after the 1906, 1908, 1922 and 1930 Orders in Council demonstrate individual native voice in contrast to the order and authority of law. We thus witness how politics work in a colonial setting. An important question to follow through the remaining pages of this chapter is, "what capacities do persons and local communities have to design their own lives when they

must live by the terms of already-existing structures, or of dominant, originally alien ways of behavior?"

Local reactions to the Orders in Council were varied. In some cases the shrine was simply moved elsewhere. Sometimes the original name of the shrine was retained. At other times, the shrine assumed a different name or succession of names. One report from August, 1923 claims that Hwe me so appeared in Asante District under no fewer than seven names. These names were listed as, "Guasa, Ahunu, Brehu, Mframa, Kwesi, Akua, and Sakra." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/452) This report was issued less than one year after the official ban of Hwe me so. Thus, one defendant informed the Chief Commissioner of Asante in 1938 that, "I am aware that it is the custom, when a Fetish is forbidden by name, for the same Fetish to be practiced under another name."

Many other instances of resistance to colonial rules regarding witch finding were to follow. Policemen who were charged with the arrest of "fetish men," and with the destruction of the shrines themselves were noted to be capable of taking bribes by shrine adherents and by shrine priests. They were persuaded to act in complicity with the priests rather than in accordance to orders from the government. Thus, during the 1923 crack down on Hwe me so, a policeman known as Mr. Ghartey was sent to witness the illegal actions of the shrine. He confronted "all the people playing with their fetish." But rather than report his findings, "he received a bribe from the people and left away with the intention that there is no Hwemisu in the town." Further investigation of the matter led to the disclosure that those in the town had frequently bribed police in order to silence their opposition to their healing shrine. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/452)

Still others ignored the government ban on shrine rituals altogether. They continued to perform their rituals of healing and witch finding either in ignorance of the Order or in total disdain and opposition to government authority in matters of local custom. C.C. Johnson wrote in 1923, "Why are people here still playing "Hwemisu" fetish?...Now it is with regret to report that our people here headed by the Chief himself are still practicing this thing...We hope you [police] could do the best for us to save our town and let Christianity rule the town." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/452)

The continuity of Asante religious symbols, imagery and meanings is recently shown by Obeng. Asante converts to Catholicism never accepted the dogma of Christ as it was presented by missionaries. Rather, the person and power of Christ were understood within traditional religious imagery and contexts. For example, Asante Catholics consider Christ as a healer. But Christ miraculously heals an individual not to demonstrate the power of God, but to realign human relations between that individual and others around him. As mentioned above, Asante visited shrines because they believed their misfortune might be a direct consequence of an offense they committed, or what a relative did. Confession was not for forgiveness, but to reshape relations between persons. Without this, healing may not take place. For Asante Catholic converts, Jesus "goes beyond the diagnosis of the illness and the local knowledge about remedies for illness to address the restoration of the individual to society and to the spirit world." (Obeng: 1996, p. 204) Asante Catholics also noted that Jesus touched the sick, used saliva, said prayers, and spoken words to heal just like witch finders who may add herbs or other spiritual icons. Moreover, Christ's communication with evil spirits in order to heal strongly resembles methods used by witch finders as they

communicate with spirits in their course of therapy. Thus, illnesses which diminished the total well-being and personhood of individuals were reproached verbally and through rites. According to Obeng, Catholic converts did not see Jesus in the same way as their European clergy. Rather, "when we meet Jesus in the gospels, we see a healer, a witch doctor" who heals to point to "wholeness which encompasses health, forgiveness, reconciliation." (Obeng: 1996, p. 205) Such a "black theology" was likely among Asante converts to all Christian sects.

While the administration believed it had created a method for suppressing all witch and witch finding activities, its 1922 Order only put to the test its own abilities to govern such actions. Very few local inhabitants conceded to the Order. Yet while there was never direct opposition in the form of violence, the capacity for resistance took other means. These methods demonstrate again the control and creativity of power of persons in regards to witch finding. They show how local populations were not only acted upon, but were able to react in assertion of their own views. Often their actions were clearly outside the law. At other times, they were deliberate adjustments in order to circumvent the law. In either case, colonial rules had little effect in restricting the deluge of healing and witch finding cults in the 1920s. The government only hoped that its 1930 Order would be more effective

Reactions to the 1930 Order were immediate. First, there was dissent from within the colonial administration. Local authorities who had witnessed administration of medicines and ritual practices of healing performed by shrine priests were hardly in total agreement. The shrine at Suhum, mentioned above, for example was the subject of a letter by Hugh Thomas in 1932, two years after the Order. In defense of religious tolerance and

customary practice, Thomas maintains the rights of persons to seek and receive medical treatment by local healers.

> Now, although, the practice of witchcraft is not recognized by statute, the Government does not in anyway desire to fetter or shake the African in his belief in the sciences of sorcery. The African of whatever culture is saturated with superstition, and time alone will alter his view of things. In the meanwhile if a man or woman feels that she is under the influence of an evil spirit I do not think these persons, though they are obviously mentally affected, should be denied the right to approach a native physician who may have powers to exorcize the spirit. Kobina Assifu [shrine priest at Suhum] in charming away the malign influence is nothing more than the modern psychiatrist whose treatment is a form of psycho analysis, and his request is that the Order in Council no. 28 of 1930 be interpreted to permit him to treat such patients who voluntarily submit themselves to him by these methods. Provided, therefore, it is clearly understood by him that persons must only voluntarily and without the performance of any custom seek his healing potion to be changed by his alchemy, I do not think that Government can interfere further with his practice as a psycho analyst, and I so advise the reply to the petition. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

Hugh Thomas was not alone in this plea. Here he shows consideration for the medical and psychological features of witch finding at the shrines. While this view was not shared by any members of Christian leadership, it was somewhat popular with jurists and with some administrators. In a 1930 letter to the Colonial Secretary, Attorney General de Hart brought up the legal peculiarities of prosecuting witches.

> But what is witchcraft? No body appears to know exactly what it is, and so far as I am aware the subject has never been investigated at all. If it is found that it does not exist except in the imagination of some abnormal or subnormal people, then pit and not condemnation is called for; and if so, then why send anybody to prison for calling another something which has no real existence? If it does exist as a fact and if the practice thereof is harmful to any African community, then why send anybody to prison for merely accusing one of it without giving the accuser the opportunity to prove the accusation true? The onus of proof should be on the accuser. (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886)

One reason for sympathy among members of the bar was the acknowledged

difficulty in prosecuting witch finders under the code as written. One jurist noted that witchcraft itself was not sufficiently defined within any of the Orders in Council. Therefore, witch finding was likewise ambiguous. Any such ambiguity would likely lead to dismissal of charges. It was considered that witch finding took place only when there was evidence of coercion to find a witch. Self disclosures were therefore not admissible as evidence. B.A.S. Bennett wrote in 1940,

> If a member of a Fetish, the rites of which are connected with the practice of Witch or Wizard Finding, of her own free will confesses that she is a Witch this is not regarded as Witch finding. If she is accused by some person of being a Witch and is compelled to undergo the ceremony of "Witch finding" then the laws on this subject have been contravened. No evidence could be produced that a "Witch finding Ceremony" took place. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

As we shall see with some brief examples below, such was indeed the case in the 1930s and 1940s.

Another point of departure was the matter of proof. Few shrine devotee-1Xs ever ever noted to come forth providing names and information which would link others to witch finding rites in ways which were illegal. As one practitioner of Hwe me so noted in a 1922 letter to J.L. Atterbury, "it is difficult to obtain convincing proof in the Supreme Court." Moreover, it was observed that often in the presence of Europeans witch finding ceremonies often turned more to prospects of healing rather than disclosure of witch identities. As one D.C. noted for Tigare, "It is invariably difficult for the police to secure evidence to warrant a court conviction for witch finding as Magistrates often hold that the evidence discloses witch exorcizing rather than witch finding." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) Likewise, B.A.S. Bennett noted, "It is most unlikely that police will be fortunate enough to raid when an actual

Ceremony of Witch finding is being practiced."

An example of lack of evidence is given in a court case from 1940. Arrest was made of nine Tigare adherents, both male and female. On July 6, 1940 Kojo Donkor and the other "Cape Coast Nine" stood before District Magistrate Alwyn Denton Sholes. It is clear from the record that the trial was not lengthy. No sworn testimony was given. Only a limited amount of evidence was provided. The nine were charged with performing in a Tigare medicinal and witch finding ceremony some two months earlier. Sholes spoke, saying, "For that you, on the 5/7/40 at Kwadoja, did take part in the ceremony connected with witch and wizard finding otherwise known and called Tigari. Contra: to Order in Council no. 28 of 1930 made under and by virtue of section 14 of chapter 77 of the Laws of the Gold Coast."

The plea entered by all nine was, "all not guilty."

Scholes then summarily reviewed the case and the charges. "There being no case proven of witch and wizard finding having taken place the accused are hereby discharged. Exhibits to be returned to owners." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

Lack of evidence in this case was clear to Magistrate Scholes. Under English law, even in the colonies, one cannot stand convicted without evidence. This same point was noted just two months earlier by A.F.E. Fieldgate in a letter to Accra. Again concerning Tigare, he said, "I pointed out to the Omanhene [chief] that were we to receive evidence that this fetish was being used for the purpose of witch or wizard finding, or for any unlawful purpose or if any penalties were later imposed on a person as a result of a confession made, e.g., in the case of the seduction of another man's wife, those responsible would be

prosecuted." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) But such evidence was rarely forthcoming to the British. In 1935, for example, H.J. Olman, Commissioner of Police, wrote of Senya Gupo, "In conclusion, there is in my opinion, no sufficient police evidence to recommend that this fetish be prohibited or not. Only two complaints have been received regarding the supposed harm caused by this fetish. One was proved positively that the death was not caused by this fetish, and the other no inquest was held, and the cause of death is unknown." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

The evidence was lacking in part because those who knew did not talk. It was also lacking because by 1930 witch finding rituals had passed through decades of alteration and modification. The political content of Aberewa and of Hwe me so was in great decline. By 1930, the rites resembled, and were often administered by, healing sessions of herbalists. These sessions focused on the body and its physical irregularities. While witch finding was probably never completely absent from these rites, their appearance was largely medicinal in character. Diagnoses concentrated on physical symptoms of illness. In 1926, E. Norton Jones wrote of Senya Gupo, "I have made various inquires and can find no evidence of this fetish having a bad influence on the people...If healing is accelerated, I should imagine that this would be due rather to the faith than the properties of the fetish." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) The performance of medical diagnosis often persuaded magistrates to take the low road in prosecuting what they considered patients seeking local treatment for illness from doctors.

Another mitigating reason for dismissal of cases was the contractual affiliations established between healers/akɔmfoɔ and the government. Registrations of

partnership under the insurance frauds ordinance was issued to those shrine healers who desired to register their trade and pay the requisite fees for the contract. The contract acknowledged the shrine healer as owner of a business, and thus established a "newly formed partnership" between the healer and the government. In November, 1934, five such registrations were made at Bekwai near Kumase. Legal duties were handled by Silas P. Dove, barrister at law.

However, on occasions of witch finding in which murder was suspected by villagers or was alleged by the government, police were obliged to investigate the involvement of shrines. As mentioned, on many such occasions the evidence rarely stood up in court. Homicide could not be independently proven nor were autopsy results conclusive. By themselves, confessions were not sufficient means of proof without corroborating evidence from a medical pathologist. Forensic medicine had its place even in the colonies.

Cases in which confessions led to investigation and prosecution supply substantial ethnographic data. This data reveals shrine descriptions and details of witch finding ceremonies. The data also shows the difficulties of convicting defendants who were brought before magistrates on charges of witch finding. Inquisitions of death often took sworn testimony of near kin relatives and of shrine priests themselves. One such confession of murder was given in July, 1933.

> My name is Kwame Asabre. I am a native of Bepong. I am a farmer. I remember about 15 days ago on one Tuesday, myself, my younger brother Yaw Abra and some others went to Asakraka to drink medicine. I cut one fowl before the medicine and it did not take it. Yaw Abra cut one fowl and the medicine took it. There I confessed that I have killed two of my brothers. I have killed one of my wives. I have killed

three of my grand sons. I have made my mind to kill a woman named Abena Bodnah. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

A case in September, 1938 at Kumase was brought against five defendants who were charged with "taking part in a ceremony connected with the practice of witch and wizard finding." The shrine is not mentioned by name; yet under the terms of the 1930 Order, involvement with any shrine was a crime. For three of the charges, the magistrate noted that "the evidence is not enough. The accused is found not guilty." For the fourth party, evidence only slightly showed guilty. He was sentenced to a fine of five pounds and one month of prison. Evidence in the fifth case was "overwhelming." The magistrate noted, "I believe that he knew he was doing wrong and I consider he has in fact done very wrong and made a profit therefrom." The nature of this evidence was not clear. However, prosecution most likely rested on claims of "fraud and false pretense," as was noted in a separate case in 1938 brought before the same Magistrate, S.O. Quashie-Idun.

Some convictions were based on evidence derived from confession. If the accused were known to have confessed their witchcraft before a shrine after "drinking fetish," they were sometimes also obliged to render the same statements before the courts. If details in the confessions could be used as further evidence of guilt, and if the confessions were legally admissible, then the magistrate found reason to convict. It was even considered by at least one D.C. that any statement witnessed by a government official and given before a shrine should be admissible as legal evidence of guilt in a court of law. In 1928, H.P. Dixon wrote a letter in which he claimed the value of such testimony in cases of suspected homicide. One in particular involved Senya Guppo. "As far as the question of persons

having been killed by the fetish is concerned the crux of the oath in a Court of Law is, "if I do not speak the truth may the fetish kill me." I am inclined to substitute "Senyakoppo" for some of the oaths sworn in court." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/452)

One such statement was registered in the tribunal record book in 1928. The witch revealed herself before Kukuro, an ancient shrine said to date back to the reign of Asantehene Opoku Ware (1720-1750). The woman later confessed her crimes before the magistrate. The confession illustrates human identification with the antelope, the Asante symbol of nature and the wild, as noted above in chapter II. The woman also invokes the powers of Kukuro, a shrine which is said to pre-date the period of Asante decline in the eighteenth century and the annexation by the British of the Asante state.

> My name is Ekua Fokuo. Am a native of Potrikrome in Ashanti. I went to Amuoman Achiasi [ɔkɔmfoɔ]sometime ago. I went out one day to dry my cloth and found a bead lying on the ground. I picked the bead and held it in a position as to break it, and was easily done being broken into two pieces. These pieces, as by a miracle at once represented the two horns of an antelope. I at once commenced to be a witch and could fly to any part of the world at desire. I could kill any man by my witchcraft, even cause one's cocoa farm or trade to fail him, except those under the protection of Nana Kukuro.
> I solicited Nana Kukuro and went under her protection and vowed not to injure anybody in any manner. If I do, she should catch me and anybody who would do it to me should also be caught.
> I was eventually prompted to go to my malpractice once again to kill my brother named Kwasi Nsia by poisoning in a soup made of the flesh of my child. (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61)

Ekua then explains how a snake came rushing into her house one night from her roof, how the appearance of the snake terrified her, and how she came to confess her witchcraft before the Kukuro shrine. The woman rendered the same testimony, including the acts of homicide before a magistrate. Her case was pleaded before the court; but no

judgment is recorded.

A similar case was recorded May 26, 1922 when 30 men were accused of practicing before the illegal Hwe me so shrine. Because they had rendered testimony of a self incriminating sort, and because in court they all plead guilty, they were all sentenced to two months in jail. The same circumstances were repeated two days later. Twelve men appeared before the same magistrate, W.A. Renner. He repeated his sentence of two months, but suspended the time for all 42 of the accused. Instead, a penalty of 10 pounds was levied.

Such self incrimination and pleas of guilt were extremely rare in the witch finding cases of the Gold Coast Colony. Rather, defendants often made lengthy pleas of innocence, either directly or through their village chiefs. Defendants soon realized they could be successful in pleading at trial if they challenged the governments evidence. In cases of extortion, the government had little recourse but to prosecute only the ɔkɔmfɔ involved in the exchange of money. Evidence simply would not convict any other of the shrine officials. However, even at trial, witnesses rarely supported the government's case. Rather, they mostly claimed they had relinquished their funds willingly in order to obtain the services offered by the shrine priest. Moreover, the services were sought out willingly. Coercion in cases of extortion was extremely hard to prove in court. Many officials in the Colony were totally enraged with this reality.

Cases of suspected homicide in witch finding trials often met with similar kinds of legal loop holes. After the Hwe me so scare of 1922, autopsies were routinely performed on the bodies of those who died in connection with witch finding rituals. In most cases, an autopsy revealed that the means of death either suspected by an alleged witch or

given as testimony by a self confessed witch did not match up with the conclusions of a pathologist. In other words, science would not support the claims rendered in witch finding ceremonies. Thus, even in cases of self confession, many of them to outrageous to be believed, a conviction was difficult or impossible because of lack of proof. In the colonial courts in West Africa, the proof had to support the alleged crime. When it did not, a crime could not be demonstrated. In such cases, the defendant could not be convicted. By 1930, acquittals in such cases added to the frustration of administrators and government administration. It was for reasons of dismissal that the comprehensive Order number 28 of 1930 was issued. But as the government was soon to realize, this rule implied a legal problem of an even more fundamental nature. This problem is the subject of the final section of this chapter.

### 5.5 *Mens Rea*: The Legal Problems in Colonial Courts

Orders in Council mentioned in this chapter were written by the Governor. They were not codified under Gold Coast law. Instead, they were issued as regulations under the general authority of the Laws of the Gold Coast Colony. The Laws were codified in 1898 and were then supplemented for nearly fifty years until Independence. Orders in Council concerning witch finding took as their general legal guidance the section of the Laws known as the Native Customs Ordinance. Odwira and other rites of state were made illegal under the 1898 ordinance. After the witch finding proliferation of the late 1910s and 1920s, the section was appended to include a paragraph on witchcraft and witch finding accusations. Once set into legal form, the wording of this law provided a seemingly indisputable source of legal authority. British officials referred to the law as an act to bring

about the destruction of shrines and witch finding practices. Veiled in its attempt to civilize, the Ordinance was therefore deemed right and correct for the inhabitants of the Colony. The wording is as follows.

> Who ever directly or indirectly promotes, encourages, or facilitates the worship or invocation of any fetish which it is pretended ro reputed, has power to protect persons in the commission of, or guilty of crime, or to injure persons giving information of the commission of crime, or which has been suppressed by order of the Governor in Council under section 14 hereof, shall be liable to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds. (Smith: 1928, p. 1187)

This law contains reference to an even broader source of legislation in matters of the customs of local peoples. Section 14 allows the Governor power to make any ritual or public and private ceremony a crime under any circumstances. Section 14 reads as follows. The Governor in Council may alter or revoke orders as he may deem necessary:

> For prohibiting, suppressing, or regulating the celebration, cultivation, or practice of any native custom, rite, ceremony, or worship not mentioned in this ordinance and which may appear to him to involve or to tend towards the commission of crime or a breach of the peace or otherwise to be harmful. (Smith: 1928, p. 1192)

However, British administration learned in the 1920s and 1930s that criminal charges lodged under these laws would often not be upheld in the colonial courts. As mentioned above, the courts were consistently challenged to justify convictions of witchcraft cases. Lack of proof and evidence were two major reasons. Seidman has claimed about colonial courts in Africa, "it is difficult to see how an act of witchcraft unaccompanied by some physical attack could be brought within the principles of English Common Law." (Seidman: 1965, p. 4)

Dismissal of witch finding cases was due, in part, to the nature of the crime.

Witchcraft had not been recognized as an action which could be prosecuted in England for centuries. British considered witchcraft silly and superstitious as they observed it in Africa. It was clearly not part of the rational, scientific frame of mind of Victorian Englishmen. One D.C. referred to such the trial of witch finding cases in a manner reminiscent of Levy-Bruhl: "admission of guilt in these cases [is] acting upon ingrained primitive beliefs." Witchcraft was even more an anomaly to the middle class work ethic, of which the Methodists and Presbyterians were embodied illustrations. Thus, African approaches to circumstances of illness, calamity, death, and unfortunate events, were "sharply at variance with that of the average Englishman." (Seidman: 1967, p. 1139) As Seidman notes, in a legal sense this difference is not insignificant. Problems arise with the two different cultural systems under the notion of *mens rea*, or reasonable person, maintained by the defendant.

The test of reasonableness is constantly applied in cases of criminal and tort law in England and in the United States. Its application rests on the common assumption of how a reasonable person on the street would act under any given set of circumstances. A common standard of behavior is assumed. Thus, although circumstances will always vary, one must apply the standard to those circumstances. Reasonableness in actions is based on those standards. The concept thus assumes that what is reasonable and normal is understand and acknowledged by all members of the population. While magistrates in the Colony were aware of this point of law, this was not always the case for district and colonial officers. It was rarely the case with Christian clergy, the largest adherents of legislation against witch finding.

In their assumption of *mens rea* under English Common Law, the colonial

magistrates invariably concluded that threats to the person "must be such that a reasonable Englishman would recognize, not the sort which would seem frightening only to an African steeped in the culture of the bush." (Seidman: 1966, p. 1142) With this Eurocentric bias in the law, magistrates in the Gold Coast dismissed many, if not most, cases of witch finding. They concluded that a reasonable person would not make accusations of witchcraft based on the evidence provided in most cases. In other words, sudden death or illness, crop failure, and cocoa blight were recognized as reasons for witchcraft suspicion to many local populations in Africa. But to the British notion of the reasonable man, these conditions could not be used to prosecute since a reasonable person would not act in such a non-rational manner.

In those unusual cases when magistrates found a need to prosecute under the Orders in Council, the sentence was usually mitigated. In such cases, magistrates were attempting to educate the guilty in the ways of civilization. Rather than punish, they were constrained to show mercy even in times of legal guilt. A case from Kumase in 1935, for example, details the sentencing of 15 defendants who were found guilty of performing witch finding rites connected with Senya Gupo. The sentence was light, varying from six weeks to three months. Two years later, a similar case shows the conviction of a village chief and 27 under the 1930 Order. The chief was fined 25 pounds sterling. The "rest of the accused were severely reprimanded, the Court taking into consideration that whatever they did was on this instruction of the [chief] Omanhene." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) Thus, *mens rea* became an active code in both guilt finding and in sentencing of the guilty. This fact was noted by Seidman.

> To the extent that the *Weltanschauung* — the whole system of beliefs, mores, and ideologies — of its subjects matches that imminent in the criminal law, no doubt objective *mens rea* reaches a defensible, ethical result in most cases, for in most cases the subjective appreciation of his criminality by the accused will be the same as that of the reasonable man in his society. ..Where the particular individual varies too radically from the norm, mitigation of punishment and executive clemency are available to prevent too gross a violation of ethical notions. (Seidman: 1966, p. 1158)

Seidman's legal treatise ignores the fact that in Africa, witchcraft and witch finding are tied to relations of power, and that these form an essential part of the system of religion and ritual of the people. As such, they also define personhood; and they continued to do so even under conditions of colonial overrule which imposed legislation aimed at prohibiting such behavior. In a cultural sense, aspects of personhood were (re)experienced within the politics of colonialism.

The ineffectiveness of the courts to prosecute was especially frustrating to administration and clergy who lobbied hard for the regulations in the first place. The results must have seemed antithetical. Thus, the colonial machinery in the Gold Coast cannot be understood to speak with a unitary voice in matters of local customs. While all these sectors of British society were attempting to civilize the African, their own codes of conduct put them at odds with one another. This point is well made by Cyprian Fisiy, who speaks of a similar situation in colonial Cameroon.

> The irony in the whole situation was that, while administrators were fighting to eradicate witchcraft and secret societies, their counterparts, the colonial judges, were zealously setting witches free in their courts for lack of proof. Both were working for the same ideal — that of civilizing the "natives" — even though the results were diametrically opposite. What a paradox! (Fisiy: 1990, p. 5)

This point can be seen in a case from 1937 before the Court presided by William Henry Irwin. The case includes a confession of witch finding and healing from a

shrine priest. Evidence of witch finding was provided by self disclosure and testimony of the akɔmfoɔ after lengthy testimony by four members "of one family." The four family members, including husband and wife, and an aunt, recited details of how they sought medicines at the shrine in order to alleviate stomach pains in the wife. The four desired to know "who had bewitched Ekua Wunaba." All family members were asked to "drink fetish," and to subject themselves to the divining powers of the priest. This included washing themselves with water purified by the shrine. In the words of the aunt, "as I put my hand in the basin for the third time I was declared the witch." All members of the party witnessed the accusation by the priest. They rendered testimony under oath of the use of witch finding songs and dance and of ritual objects, all of which were illegal under Ordinance 30.

The case concluded with a dramatic self disclosure by the priest himself. He gave sworn testimony of his powers to divine and to heal. He then stated under oath that he performed illegal acts of witch finding in order to heal the sick.

> I am a medicine man. On the 14th October, 1937 I was invited by the second accused [husband] to go to him. I went and I examined a sick woman — Ekua Wunaba at Egyaa. I found that her stomach was swollen. I gave three medicines, the first to be applied externally, the second to be cooked with her food and the third for introduction by enema. Having applied these medicines I told Abiw that the woman was bewitched. I went into the bush and got herbs. I put them in a basin and mixed them. I stripped myself naked and smeared my own belly with the mixture. I then spat it out and repeated some words, an incantation, onto the woman's belly. Each of the persons present then dipped into the basin lapped up some of the medicine and did as I had done. Ekua Yamuaba did this but as she dipped her hand into the basin it shook so as to splash the medicine out of the basin. I then asked her if she was a witch. She made as if to go away. I struck her back and asked her to come to me. Then she ran away. Later in another house Sakuwa sat on my lap. I declared her to be a witch and swore the oath "Anamabu Sunday" on her. Sakuwa responded to the oath. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

Magistrate Irwin then found the priest guilty. However, he pronounced the "accused discharged," or not guilty, and the case was dismissed. Even under direct and non-contradictory testimony, the guilty party in this case was set free. By statute the shrine priest was guilty. But the magistrate considered actions of the priest to be within a legitimate and reasonable realm of behavior in regards to local custom. In other words, the priest may have violated laws of the Colony; but to the court he had acted within reason. His testimony was not contradictory of the behaviors of others in society. Indeed, of dozens of tribunal reports in the Archives, I did not read of a single case where a guilty verdict resulted in the maximum fine or sentence. Many defendants were found guilty. But few were sentenced or fined. Even fewer served time or paid a full penalty.

As a result of the statutory ineffectiveness to legislate witch finding and prosecute witch finders, the state adopted alternative measures. By 1940 the colonial government declared healing to be the predominant concern of witch finding. Their objections to the evil and immoral aspects of witch finding cults dwindled as district commissioners offices became inundated with letters pleading for the state to legitimize the healing powers of the shrines. As a result of the pleas, and because colonial laws and courts proved incapable of suppressing the cults, the colonial government reversed its course. They proceeded to recognize medical and healing abilities of shrine priests. They labeled the priests as herbalists, and considered their practices of herbal healing legitimate as long as the healers were licensed by the state. An Extract from the Minutes of the State Council during its session of June 12, 1940 includes the following new restrictions on healing by the herbalists.

1. Any native who has established, or proposes to establish and practice any fetish in any part of the State shall forthwith introduce himself or herself to the Chief of the place and shall pay to such Chief the sum of 2 pounds, eight shillings. He shall simultaneously pay to the Native Administration Treasury a further sum of 2 pounds, eight shillings. The name of the fetish man, his fetish, and the fee so paid shall be entered in a book kept for the purpose by the Treasurer.
2. Evry native medicine man or fetish man shall obtain an Herbalist License and pay therefore the sum of 30 pounds. The License shall be renewable at the end of the year, that is, 31st December each year on payment of the sum of 30 pounds. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

The Minutes continued by regulating the fee which may be charged to each patient, and by stating that the Colony may take no further action against the healers once the recommended fees had been collected. The new regulations had immediate appeal. Two months later, a letter from solicitor Joseph T. Sackeyfio applied for such a medical license for his client, a Tigare practitioner in Cape Coast. By 1945, these regulations adapted by a small number districts had become applied to all districts of the colony. Under the guise of medicine and healing, witch finders and their practices were recognized by the colonial government.

Meanwhile, disputes in which causes of action involved witchcraft were settled privately or were remanded to tribal courts. Two cases from 1945 printed in the newspaper provide examples of the modernity of witchcraft. The first involves an adulterous wife who refuses to "drink fetish" in order to cause a confession of her guilt.

"Former Wife refuses to Drink Fetish"

The Asantehene's Divisional Court "B" on Wednesday, December 12, 1945 adjourned further hearings in action instituted by Kojo Adu against his former wife, Yaa Achiah. The plaintiff is seeking satisfaction for why the defendant refused to drink fetish in proof of her fidelity since their marriage was dissolved in February, 1945 and the defendant intended to marry

The second article also involves marital difficulties and suspicions of adultery. The case

originated within the courts of Techiman.

> On Saturday April 21, 1945, a woman by name Afua Kyah of Bechem with her husband Kobina Kwakye who had been in this town for about four years confessed to adultery. 22 men have had sexual connection with her. The woman first denied and was sent to a Fetish "Bruma" before she made the confession.

The article named the men. The women was brought before the Techniman King who dismissed any adultery fees to her husband as "the woman is a harlot."

To Asante, the resolution of certain human and societal difficulties lay beyond the limits of cultural and social capacities. Because this is a fact in Asante history, clarification and discernment were continually sought from this dimension. In pre colonial Asante, the realm of nature represented a vast and spacious capacity for power, both for the blessing and curse of human persons. Prior to 1897, this power was controlled exclusively by the asantehene and his legitimate ritual specialists. All aspects of personhood were legitimized through that source. After Asante was annexed, the power of the wild continued to reside in nature; but it became accessible through different means. These means, witch finding shrines, appeared to be more private and individualistic than before. Rather than controlled by the state, the shrines were owned and operated by private Asante, now citizens of the British Empire. Instead of being used by the king for stately affairs, the powers of the wild were pursued for a multitude of purposes; and their access came as a spectacular financial boon to those who owned the shrines.

Shrine ceremonies and the idea of mystical healing presented another image during colonialism. The practices were evil and immoral. Because the shrines made no mention of Biblical doctrines, they were viewed as an affront to Christian traditions. For the

British, they presented an image of otherness in which custom appears to belong to a epoch of time far distant from the present. (Fabian: 1983) The shrines were truly out of step with civilization, and were therefore offensive in their existence. Attempts to regulate witch finding shrines under colonial law presented new circumstances for both the British and for shrine devotees.

In this chapter we have seen how local populations reassert notions of personhood and power within Asante cosmology in response to British attempts to legislate and suppress customary and mystical activities. Means for this assertion have taken such controvertible and evasive measures as silence in regards to the facts, failure to cooperate with police and government investigations, denial of the authenticity of certain events and practices, geographic relocations, rejection of legal authority, refutation of governmental control, non complicity in legal suppression, sworn court testimony of the reality and efficacy of witchcraft, and resistance to the legitimate powers which attempted to regulate local customs. In this regard, Asante demonstrated features of identity and power within a familiar cosmos. This identity, in turn, asserts forms of personhood in attempts to continue practices of witch finding. From the mid nineteenth century, the Asante world was troubled by disruptive internal matters of state. After colonization, their world acquired new dimensions of power and of relations of control and authority. In this period, power and agency became "instrumentalities which people actively use in constructing and reconstructing a world which adjusts values and goals inherited from the past to the problems and exigencies which comprise their social existence in the here and now." (Jackson and Karp: 1990, p. 28)

This chapter has attempted to show how a new world was created for Asante because of the expansion of European institutions of church and state. This chapter has also argued how Asante assumed various aspects of that world. However, Asante were never entirely adaptive to all details of European life; and they were consistently and consciously resistant to some of the most demanding and fundamental aspects of British society. I have attempted to show, further, that Asante defendants in court cases of witch finding were rarely convicted by a full measure of the law. In this regard, Asante appear victorious in a profound conflict of cultures in British West Africa. This data is based on personal experiences of individual Asante. Certain constant features may be extracted from these experiences. The final two chapters of this thesis analyze the data (experiences) in the light of theory and comparison. These chapters show how experience is often both individual and cultural, and how identity and personhood have been constant features of witch finding cults during the period of 1879 to 1945.

## Chapter VI

### Healing, Personhood and Power in Asante

In this thesis, I have argued that Asante witch finding movements of the late nineteenth and early to mid twentieth centuries were primarily cults of medicine and healing. The movements conformed to Asante notions of illness which have been defined as symptoms of disease which are the results of anti-social and anti-lineage actions and conduct. This meaningful approach to illness, disease and healing conforms to the approach advanced by Good when he asserted that medical knowledge is a cultural construct because illness itself is "socially and culturally variant." (Good: 1994, p. 118) A fundamental precept of this approach is the claim that categories of illness from one cultural or historical setting may be inapplicable and meaningless in another. A comprehension and use of this concept has important implications for an anthropology of personal experience. Writings of Weber and Geertz are applicable, and are briefly outlined here.

I have also argued that spiritual forces or causes of whatever sort in Asante implied uses of power. Power was seen as residing in social, natural, and supernatural realms. I have stated that power in this sense extends beyond the Western notion of power, or one limited to a concentration of authority within a central figure or institution. In Asante, power originated in the Asante cosmos. As such, it was accessible to all. It was the control of authority structures that became the prerogative of designated lineages. This historical development of facts designated particular relations of gender, age, and social stratification. Thus, while powers of the state were legitimized within the person of the king, other mystical forms of power were driven underground or were periodically cleansed through personal and

state rituals. Witchcraft exemplifies mystical power.

Furthermore, I have argued that these creative forms of power reasserted themselves as state power "was compromised, weakened, or non-existent." (Akyeampong and Obeng: 1995, p. 25) I have argued for the periodic development of this process, stating that the Asante state was compromised in the mid nineteenth century. This weakening continued until its annexation. Where power was once legitimized within the person of the king, others were able to access powers of the Asante cosmology. Movements of witch finding represent an access to powers within the Asante cosmology. I have also claimed that the matrilineage was the most common place for witchcraft accusations and witch catching, and that ritual healing addressed various dimensions of Asante personhood. I shall now provide contextual support for these arguments.

**6.1 Techniques of the Body: Experience**

Embodiment and techniques of the body, including experience, sensation and creativity have a formal place in anthropology. Hallowell linked behavior to the objective world, but considered objective as created by cultural specific criteria. Human perception, including self-awareness and reflexivity, was linked with cultural constraints. (Hallowell: 1955) Csdoras recently added that perception and cultural realities are grounded in embodiment. This he calls "our essential existential condition," and considers the body to be the primary criteria for defining experience and thereby placing one's self in the world. In other words, the body defines one's place in a social environment. The sensations, imagination, and perceptions of the body, its basic experience, cause this to be so. (Csordas: 1994, p. 6-7)

This concern was also taken up by Victor Turner in 1967. His exploration of the condensation of the "ideological" and physiological" poles may be viewed as an early concern for embodiment. He wrote of Ndembu ritual and its conditions of liminality. "Whatever the mode of representation, the body is regarded as a sort of symbolic template for the communication of *gnosis*, mystical knowledge about the nature of things and how they came to be what they are." (Turner: 1967, p. 107) For Turner, bodily symbols conveyed understanding to otherwise inexpressible ideals. This was, for Turner, the transforming power of symbols.

But more recent writers argue the body is more basic to human existence. By stating that "techniques of the body" are cultural categories literally embodied in social relations, Mauss denied the primordial quality of Turner's sensory pole. Mauss also denies the clear distinction between human perception and ideology. (Mauss: 1979)

Mauss's notion of habitus has been adapted by Bourdieu and others. Bourdieu considers the body as a means of establishing the person in society. The body, he says, contains the "fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture." Moreover, the body is always both a form of social values and personal existence. While these values are not always immediately perceived by everyone, they are always present.

> The principles em-bodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy. (Bourdieu: 1977, p. 94)

In pre-colonial Asante, the body was an experiential locus for all of these

social relations manifest within the state: its cosmology, its ethics and values, its metaphysics, and its polity. Thus, in conditions of cosmology and religion, the state contained within itself the power and authority to define circumstances of death. As death came by the knife in odwira, for example, the king recited both formal farewells and commands to serve particular Asantahene in the "land of the ghosts," asamaŋdow.

This argument follows Weber's notion of *Verstehen.* The notion proceeds from theory to data and back again, and assumes the interpretative content of social action. Weber would argue that individual Asante, including the victims of witchcraft, are not bereft of personal motivations, intentions and experiences; however, these are simply personal echoes in the larger body of the state and its history. Weber would not deny existential realities of eighteenth and nineteenth century Asante. These included the immediacies of human existence, both social and in nature: birth, illness, death, disaster, misfortune, reproduction, the wild, spirits, devils, food, competition, wealth, disease, and all other contingencies. However, for Weber, in all personal experiences the state remains positioned above all these. It directs and supplies meaning to these experiences, rather than the reverse.

The argument of Weber has had its strongest support in anthropology through the writings of Clifford Geertz. Geertz criticizes cognitive social scientists who may reduce culture to mental phenomena. He also criticizes the reduction of culture to patterns of behavior. As with Weber, Geertz does not deny that personal desires and intentions exists. What he denies is that either of these have any cultural relevance. "Culture consists of socially established structures of meaning," and "culture is public because meaning is." (Geertz: 1973, p. 12) The well known examples of "public," as opposed to private, behavior

are the Beethoven quartet and a wink. These exemplify culture. What is true of these is true of culture in general.

Unfortunately, Geertz excludes the capacity for personal experience and human intentions in such a model. Experience may not be interpreted by all members of a community. They are thus not viewed as cultural or historical in Weber's theory of social action. Yet persons often extract cultural sense and values and then subject them to creatively new and personal/private perspectives. (Obeyesekere: 1981) What makes melodic intonation music instead of noise is an internalized capacity to mediate individual responses to notes and sounds. A Beethoven quartet does not precisely follow such capacities, but it cannot be recognized as music without them. In other words, culture and history do not account for the range of all behaviors in individuals. Nor do they provide a thorough understanding of behavior which sometimes contradicts or confounds communally defined expectations. (D'Andrade: 1992, pp. 23-44)

Personhood is often constructed through meaningful personal experiences as well as through cultural values. Individuals utilize these experiences in interactions with other persons and between themselves and the natural world. Data in this thesis is meant to demonstrate "that to view culture as acting on a person is too simplistic. We cannot any longer take for granted that we know why a person is doing something when his actions happen to coincide with the "dictates" of his culture." (Riesman: 1986, p. 91)

Issues presented in this dissertation support the argument that the major locus of experience within the cults was the human body along with its capacities to decay, die, and be healed. Witch finding movements were thus both cultural and historical in their own

right even though their content and position were anomalous in pre and post-colonial society. Let us take another look at how the body and healing the body through witch finding allows for this assertion in Asante.

The Akan philosopher Gyekye has written concerning the Akan notion of the person. The person is composed of ɔkra, or soul, and the body. As seen in chapter two, ɔkra establishes a principle element of the spiritual complex of a person. The ɔkra is a repository for various aspects of the person's sense of ɔkrabea; and destiny, human choice and free will are closely linked in the Asante notion of personhood. Death occurs when ɔkra vacates the body. Thus, "the Akan belief in disembodied survival in the form of spirit or soul presupposes a nonmaterial conception of a human being. The ontological pull of the Akan language toward materialism is consequently enfeebled." (Gyekye: 1995, p. 168)

This statement provides for a priority of importance in the Asante notion of the person. However, the body, although secondary in relation to ɔkra, maintains its own qualities and socially definable criteria. The body exists in "a world whose schema it bears in itself." (Merleau-Ponty: 1964, p. 67) In Asante history, the human body provided signifying paradigms of ideological concreteness -- notably references to uses of power, and to rituals of containment and disclosure at times of illness and death. Ethnography presented in this thesis support this claim and help to clarify its historical significance and particularities. The body served to construct aspects of "habitus," or "the endless capacity to engender products-- thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions--whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production." (Bourdieu: 1977, p. 95) This concept of the body has been argued in several ways throughout the thesis.

First, the cults and their shrines pre-date the colonial era, although they were greatly transformed by modernity. We agree with Goody's assessment that, "medicine shrines are established features of the area, not recent anomalies." (Goody: 1956, p. 360) This summary coincides with Brantley's discussion of witch catching in coastal Kenya: "control techniques might have roots in the pre-colonial period." (Brantly: 1979, p. 112). Parkin has similarly concluded that such movements, "are often long-standing cultural features stemming from the pre-colonial era." (Parkin: 1968, p. 424)

The historical claim strongly disputes the premise of Margaret Field that Akan concerns for witchcraft and witch detection resulted from mental and emotional stress which was derived from social and economic displacements of colonialism. Notes Field, "The main causes of the increased preoccupation with witchcraft are, I think, two: firstly, venereal disease and secondly cocoa." (MJF: ASSM, 1945) Her argument expands to include strictly biomedical causes of witchcraft suspicions. Venereal disease "is responsible for melancholia, marital misery, embittered outlook on life, and a in general for most of the neurosis which is the solid substratum of witchcraft. "MJF:ASSM, 1945) Fields concluded that the shrines she saw first hand were symptoms of mental illness, and that this was caused by an awareness of venereal disease. "Venereal disease, as a source of neurosis, afflicts literate and illiterate alike. The shrines are thus the resort of mental patients in every stage of unbalance." (NAG: 23/1/622) This sort of argument, denounced above in Chapter I, explores bio-medical symptoms as the sole cause of witchcraft confessions and accusations. In light of the historical data given above, such a position is historically untenable. I have claimed that concepts of illness and therapy assumed in the cults were consistent with

traditional Asante notions of healing the body. Moreover, witchcraft accusations and confessions in the twentieth century assumed new imagery which included monetary affluence, capitalism, and wealth in commodities.

Secondly, unlike Goody's assessment of medicine shrines representing customary forms of ritual, we have argued along the lines of Evans-Pritchard (1937): that forms of witchcraft and witch finding are understood only in regard to specific practical social circumstances. These include the ways in which, through particular contexts, witch finding allows assigning responsibility for, and demands action against, specific human inequities and misfortunes. Historical and contemporary data on witchcraft appear to bear out this fact with impunity. In Western France, the onslaught of witchcraft,

> gives a pattern to misfortunes which are repeated and range over the persons and belongings of a bewitched couple: in succession, a heifer dies, the wife has a miscarriage, the child is covered in spots, the car runs into a ditch, the butter won't churn, the bread won't rise, the geese bolt, or the daughter they want to marry off goes into a decline. Every morning, the couple ask anxiously: "What on earth will happen next?" And every time some misfortune occurs: always unexpected, always inexplicable." (Favret-Saada: 1980, p. 6)

Situational dilemmas of witchcraft are not amenable to customary judicial processes. As noted recently in Cameroon, "witchcraft is always bad, entirely uncontrollable, outside politics." (Pradelles de Latour: 1996, p. 603) Thus, Parkin has posed a query of recent witch finding movements: "may they not also be viewed as periodic reassessments of internal role change among the very people active in the movements?" (Parkin: 1968: p. 424) This was indeed the case in later nineteenth century Asante.

The ɔdomaŋkama witch finding movement of 1879 and afterward may be seen as an attempt to mystically resolve/oppose/controvert political, economic and social

inequities of corrupt royalty. The movement sought to define ethical premises of Asante society betrayed and confounded by its king. Rather than expressing social cohesion, the movement underscored divisions in society. Instead of integrating classes and statuses, the movement attempted a creative renegotiation of the basis of power. In a moral mockery of the state, members of ɔdomaŋkama even established their courts and royal authority. These courts even tried cases involving witchcraft accusations against individuals. The moral content of ɔdomaŋkama in general was one of witch finding at the level of the state.

Witches and witch finding thus served as a litmus test in the multi-faceted phenomenon of the moral dimensions of "community" as it underwent changing economic and social margins. It was a phenomenon framed in the shifting populations of country and city in West Africa. Bastian, for example, describes urban areas of Onitsha Igbo life. City dwellers have become self-seeking consumers who have completed a "transformation of all relations of town life into witch-like relations of expropriation and selfishness." (Bastian: 1993, p. 142) Likewise, the effectiveness of medicines in rural areas was expressed by one informant to Fortes in 1945. "My medicine is kept in village where farms are --- doesn't agree to be in the town — patients taken to village for cure. With the help of Nyame I can cure all kinds of illness, but specialize in the two that are most dreadful for Ashanti, "fainting fits" and barrenness in women." (MF: ASSM, 1945a) In this visceral, bucolic voice, we are reminded of Asante values: farm, fertility (matrilineage) and power. During the second half of the nineteenth century and well into the opening decades of this century, Asante religion and medicine were means of defense against dangers in other personally important areas.

In Asante history, witches appear to signify this process. To country folk, witches inhabit the city. They feed on the productions of farm and rural labor. They absorb wealth, goods, people, and substance with no return; and they deprive the lineage of its abilities to pass on property and wealth through inheritance, even in death. Continuity of ancestral reverence is thereby impaired. Witches thus denied social reproduction and continuity of a way of life. Ancestors defined and protected the abusua. Witches consumed human bodies, instilled barrenness and sterility in men and women, and thus kept unborn children from perpetuating the matrilineage. One self-confessed witch, Kwame Asabre, testified to his deeds in 1933. "I have killed two of my brothers. I have killed one of my wives. I have killed three of my grandsons. I have made my mind to kill a woman named Abana Boduah." (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) Conversely, ancestors sustained health and fertility within the lineage and continuity of the state. Witches endorsed illness, disease, sterility, infant mortality and child death at the local level of abusua. Another testimony from 1933 stated that his brother had been a witch. This man, Yaw Abra, stated what he knew about his brother.

> The family had been suffering an undue amount of trouble in death and debt. After we had consulted the fetish, [the brother] confessed that he was the cause of the trouble in the family. He mentioned the names of five members of the family whom he had killed by witchcraft. He did not say by what means he had used his supernatural powers...There are some members of the family who are barren and the deceased admitted that he was responsible for this. He said this when we went to the Kunde Fetish. I do not know how he made these people barren; he works in the darkness when I am asleep...The deceased was the head of the family; now I am. It was at the Kunde Fetish that deceased admitted having made people of our family barren...I know deceased was a witch. (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622)

In the nineteenth century, witches were also identified as causing dissolution or corruption

of the state. In the twentieth century, witches were identified with troubles, bad feelings, and hostilities between members of a matrilineage.

As signifying an historical setting for political economy, witchcraft accusations were broad in scope. They were flexible in application. But the signs of witchcraft were always determined by the moral meanings associated with the naturalizing features of human bodies. These features are given haunting and disturbing voices. They express themselves in terms of basic values of Asante existence: birth, life, death, illness, wealth, domination, and power. Thus, ɔdomaŋkama and early cults of the twentieth century, such as Aberewa, Kunde, and Hwe me so, were established around elements of the well being of the body and the spirit. Effects on one dimension of personhood implied effects to the other.

Impairments in procreation, impotence, sterility and even death may be seen as signifying the abuses of social reproduction within the lineage or clan. Thus, a witch finder told Fortes in 1945, "No one but a person's abusua can kill him. A man's own sister may try to kill him in order that her son could inherit his property. Most harm is caused by witches. If a man does not put preventive medicines in his new house a witch may fly in the night and drop something into the yard. When that is done people living in it will die." (MF: ASSM, 1945g)

Cannibalism and mass homicide came to be identified with accumulation of wealth and greed. Murder of one's own children and grandparents signified the destructive presence of stately powers and of intrusive economies. Witch distortions of the human image convey a displacement of social entitlements within mogya (abusua) and of personal

capacities of ɔkra. As bodies — human labor or wealth in people — fed the processes of estrangement, accumulation and personal enrichment, human figures were transformed into distorted images of witches and assumed unnatural qualities of evil supernatural entities. As similarly noted for Western France, the body is seen as the mode of experience for witchcraft of all kinds.

> The unwitcher's task is first to authenticate his patient's sufferings and his feeling of being threatened in the flesh; second, it is to locate, by close examination, the patient's vulnerable spots. It is as if his own body and those of his family, his land and all his possessions make up a single surface full of holes, through which the witch's violence might break in at any moment. (Favret-Saada: 1980, p. 8)

Witchcraft in Asante thus reversed the natural tendencies of the body and prevented them from becoming fulfilled in ways which are socially recognized and valued. The same argument may be stated for madness, hysteria, and spirit possession in many African communities. (Parkin: 1985)

Witchcraft was associated with a range of terms and human qualities which identified such natural diversions: greed, lust, envy, anger, jealousy, malice, suspicion, spite, resentment, and so forth. In Western terms, we might say that on such occasions emotions are controlling the individual. However, in such conditions Asante recognized at work the forces of nature and the powers of supernatural beings. In most cases, these forces are not limitless in scope and may be restrained. Persons may undergo healing; and personhood may be restored. Such a process is performed in healing rites of the body. These are administered, as we have seen, by akɔmfoɔ. This summary will now analyze rites of healing in witch finding cults.

**6.2 Techniques of the Body: Healing As Historic Practice**

Understanding healing processes in Asante witch finding cults is based on a singular, yet broad, ideological premise. Asante culture was positioned within an imposing and problematic nature, a wild place of unassailable endangerment. Elements of nature, recognized as the bush, were unruly, unpredictable, and calamitous. The bush was contained within its own domain. Those who ventured into the bush were enveloped within its mysteries and power. For these people, power of the bush was always foreboding. Hunters and traders were sometimes never seen again.

Because of its well known nemesis and discrete dangers the bush stood in arranged opposition to the village, the domain of human life or culture. What one domain consisted of, the other one existentially lacked and opposed. Culture contained the realm of human persons; the other contained beasts and mystical beings of the wild. Witches cavorted there, and sasabonsam was a notorious anti-human demon of the forest. Culture represented community; destructive agents of the bush were identified with anarchy. Culture was filled with social relationships and routine; the bush represented "the domain of uncertainty." (Jackson: 1982, p. 10) Thus, inhabited space was differentiated between the two domains.

Nevertheless, boundaries between the two divisions of space were not immutable. Kurotia, or village thresholds, as noted above, were seen as both spaces of culture and nature. This provided for movement and transition between the two. Such transitions were relegated to persons as well as powers. Powers of nature first appeared and were manifest in kurotia. (McLeod: 1981) Powers of the wild, including illness causing agents such as abosom, were known to and controlled by akɔmfoɔ. Conversely, all that was foreign to culture, including illness due to witchcraft, was ejected in the direction of nature

through transitional boundaries of culture.

Qualities of nature were often manifest within the realm of culture. Shape shifting is one example from African history. (Lindskog: 1954) Witchcraft is another. In Asante, witches embodied many characteristics of nature. Witches opposed the processes and relations which most notably signified human society and culture. In Asante history, these included the state and the abusua.

Identity with one's matrilineage was nothing short of marking an essential measure of personal and public existence. "Repudiating the lineage, or abusua, would be like repudiating the gift of life itself." (Clark: 1994, p. 98) Such connection extended beyond the grave and before the cradle. Bonds of personhood and power were forged between the living and unembodied entities which ensured the future prosperity of mogya which they all shared. While these ties continue in Asante lineages today, their primacy was historically threatened. In the nineteenth century, death taxes and other state revenues imposed debilitating restrictions on the perpetuity of lineage owned wealth and property. Later, British commercial interests and education imposed new forms of status, wealth and social differentiation. Colonial institutions of church and state profoundly effected relations with the lineage. (Clark: 1994)

As we have seen, the human body denoted specific relations of power and contexts of experience in both of these areas of society. The body became the medium by which powers of nature and the wild were historically summoned within social relations. In Asante history, this assault was most pronounced within the abusua and at the state level. Nature and its embodied manifestations of witches thus signified an absence of the human

plan. (Fardon: 1990, p. 149) In opposition to culture, witches attempted to destroy those aspects of Asante which sustained and promoted social processes and continuities in human existence. Witches did this through the consumption (barrenness) and destruction (sterility) of reproductive powers. The results was a loss of identity within a wider framework of the abusua. In short, "you do not know who anyone is anymore. Even more important, you do not know who YOU are anymore." (Schmoll: 1993, p. 212)

Documentation shows witchcraft as a notable and significant part of Asante history. Attempts to suppress witchcraft were also prevalent. Ramseyer and Kuhne (1875) provide ample evidence of the abundance of talismans, charms, and "medicines." All of these were intended to mystically reverse or dispel powers of the wild and of witches. All of these cults intended to eradicate witchcraft. This was done through rites of healing and revealing identities of witches. As for the individual body itself, witch-finding and healing were performed to address physical symptoms and disease. In Africa, illness is often emblematic of social catastrophe. As Yamba noted recently for Zambia, "if witchcraft is a countering of such forces at all, it is not merely an instance of protest directed at the post-colonial state or a reaction against modernity. More important, it must be seen as an attempt to make sense of existence in the era of HIV/AIDS." (Yamba: 1997, p. 203)

By 1945, two kinds of healers were recognized by the colonial government. Herbalists used a variety of herbal application in their treatment of illnesses. Their methods of diagnosis and treatment resembled routines of western medicine. They analyzed symptoms and treated them as indications of bio-medical disease. These symptoms were rarely linked with non medical causes. (Twumasi and Warren: 1986, p.118)

As we have seen, by 1945 akɔmfoɔ of certain shrines were also recognized and licensed by the British government. Priests/healers in Senya Gupo and other cults were issued medical licenses similar to those given to herbalists. This resolution came only after a lengthy legal struggle and opposition to the legitimacy of healing through divination and witch finding. Opposition to such shrines was led mostly by Christian clergy who saw the cults as forces of evil and as limiting their own labors of conversion in the Colony.

Since the first appearance of such movements in 1879, Asante witch finding cults changed in focus. By the 1920s, perhaps as a result of epidemic diseases such as small pox in 1918 and pneumonia in 1924, elements pre-colonial politics, such as seen in ɔdomaŋkama and Aberewa, were in decline. Political fervor demonstrated in other witch finding cults of the colonial era was noticeably absent in Asante. The Mwana Lessa ("Son of God") movement in Zambia and Zaire illustrates the force of politics within witch finding. Tomo Nyirenda, a charismatic prophet, drowned suspected witches during Christian baptisms. Such purging "took away the guilty." Baptism was thereby a political event in which the body allowed Nyirenda and his followers to "redeploy [an] existing organization" of chieftainship in struggles against indirect rule. (Fields: 1985, pp. 173-192).

While most Asante witch finding movements of the twentieth century were not so politically motivated, they were nevertheless historically fashioned. This history, as we have seen, was an assemblage of denoted stately capacities and conditions under which power of the state was systematically deployed.

Illness and symptomatic diseases in Asante were seen, as noted in Chapters II and IV, as disturbances in the balance and interaction between the corporeal body, and

social and natural domains. Illness was not restricted to physical symptoms. Illness also involved a confluence with social relations and natural order. Health and disease symptoms, therefore, were never removed from the context of connectedness with domains of life not immediately associated with bio-medical functions. It was considered that illness may be caused by many sources: biological antigens, antisocial behaviors, witches and mystical agents, and the malevolent interjections of nature. Disease was a disequilibrium of the person with biological factors, social relations and the forces of nature. (Appiah-Kubi: 1981, pp. 14-15)

Asante notions of illness involved more than physical symptoms. All illnesses potentially involved the effects of mystical agents. All illnesses demonstrated the powers of nature to intrude into the domain of culture and human life. Mystical entities who were known to have profound powers in nature but who were often grievously manifested them in culture were known in Asante history as abosom. Human agents known to cause bodily symptoms of illness were identified as either witches or persons temporarily capable of witchcraft.

Because witches were humans who became possessed by deleterious effects of abosom, they, too, manifested symptoms of illness. "If it is true that the person is a witch, I give him or her some medicine to bathe. He may stay in my village for two or three weeks until he becomes well again." (MF: ASSM, 1945)

However, identity as a witch was cause enough to affirm conditions of illness. Human persons manifesting capacities of witchcraft were temporarily considered as dangerous, anti-human, and as having personhood contrary to other human beings. Such

beings were unlike other persons in society. Their identities were transformed as witchcraft altered or destroyed ɔkrabea, the factors of individual human destiny. This implies negation of both identity as a person in society and of capacities mystically endowed upon the individual from the supreme deity Onyame.

Asante notions of fatalism and destiny were captured in phrases such as, "Onyamy nkrabea nni kwatibea," or "there is no bypass to God's destiny;" and "asem a Onyame de asie no, oteasefo nnan no," or "the order God has settled, living man cannot subvert." Such dimensions of personhood in Asante were essential to life. As noted earlier, they were endowed unto everyone born into mortality. In most cases, aspects of one's ɔkrabea were carried until death. As we have seen, however, these features of the person could be interrupted or impaired by the effects of witchcraft.

As many writers on Africa have noted, concepts of physiology are intricately connected with political economy (Comaroff: 1985; Weiss: 1996), mystical forces (Mullings: 1984; Janzen: 1978; Harris: 1978), and historic processes (MacGaffey: 1983; Janzen: 1982). In Asante, physiology and health of human persons was linked to each one of these factors. The historic elements were nothing less than confrontational: somatic health, political tyranny, expanding economies, devastation of traditional hierarchies, colonial evangelism, and new relations of church and state. In these evolving social conditions, illness was seen as it always had been. Asante illness presumed actions of an anti-social nature. Within these developments, witch catching movements represented new methods of healing the person. Healing and witch finding were considered as remedies in this unlikely environment.

Chapter VII

History, Personhood and Power

This concluding chapter provides an interpretative context for the data presented in this thesis. Interpretation regards the relevance of contemporary anthropological concepts of history, personhood and agency in relation to witch finding in Asante, 1879-1945.

**7.1 History: (Re)Creating the Past and the Present**

This thesis presents in detail the activities and historical development of witch finding movements in Asante. The earliest known documentation shows that movements began in Asante in 1879, although the Reverend Hans Debrunner notes that witch finding cults began elsewhere in the Gold Coast over twenty years earlier. (Debrunner: 1961, p. 106) Some cults, such as Tigare, continue to the present time. Cults demonstrate goals, intentions and ambitions of individual cult officiators and members. These included adjustments to political and economic changes internal to society.

Healing of cult members before shrines may be considered a form of historic practice. The individual human body received therapy by means of traditional forms of medicine and religion. The social body was also perceived as rife with disease. The asanteman, or the elementary and non-negotiable ethics of Asante history, had been controverted, refuted and betrayed. Witch finding movements such as ɔdomaŋkama and Aberewa pursued a renewal of Asante ethics. They sought to discredit current government. But they did so with the explicit purpose of reconnecting the noble past with the present. The state would thereby be denied power of ancestral heritage, royal descent and ethical

correctness. Through creative manipulations of power, these same qualities were to be endowed upon the creators and proponents of ɔdomaŋkama. Assumption of the identities of mythical figures such as Komfo Anokye made this transition a possibility.

The thesis has also detailed external pressures brought on by administrative regulations and law, by missions, and by expanding global economies. The cults took on a decidedly medical orientation when, in 1940-1945, the colonial government began regulating them as indigenous forms of medicine and healing. Many shrine practitioners purchased state licenses in order to continue their practice as healers. After 1945, healing performances in many cults were defined and regulated by the British government. From that date, many Asante witch finding cults were transformed into institutions of modernity. Their purposes and content fell under government regulation. A similar transition has been described elsewhere as, "a move from a kind of itinerant adventurism to the settled state of successful local herbalist businessman." (Parkin: 1991, p. 28)

I have has stressed the historical and experiential properties of cult rituals, shrine boundaries, priests, placement of shrines at the periphery of villages, medical practices, and a wide range of cosmological and religious precepts. The cults did not create an explicitly new religious language or set of beliefs. But they did alter the application of idioms of Asante mysticism. Indeed, Asante witch finding movements were never mere expressions of speculative or imagined cosmologies. Rather, their aims were concrete and pragmatic. Their resolutions, made of micro-politics legitimized by ritually transforming emblems known as "fetishes," were expedient and precise.

Witchcraft was itself substantive and historically specific. Its occurrences

were explicable only by its resolute capacities as a "harmful phenomena in particular places, at particular times, and in relation to particular persons." (Evans-Pritchard: 1937, p. 72) A recent analysis of witchcraft and witch-finding from Lebowa, South Africa, confirms this observation. "I suggest that the witchcraft complex should be viewed primarily as an attempt by ordinary villagers to deal with undeserved misfortune." (Niehaus: 1993, p. 498) Witchcraft provided a consignment of responsibility for tangible human misfortunes and inequalities. (Green: 1994) As noted by Peletz in Malaysia, not all misfortunes and illnesses due to demons were "controlled by human agency." (Peletz: 1993, p. 172) Putting the witches under the higher power of an abosom through oaths and medicines reduced the surplus powers and dangerous personhood of the witch.

Asante documentation emphasizes the intensely personal character of witchcraft. Its occurrences always pertained to specific personal circumstances of inequality and misfortune. This hallmark of Asante witchcraft was similar to Azande where a witch-doctor was summoned on occasions of "sickness, failure in hunting, indecision in agricultural activities, barrenness of wives, social difficulties of various kinds, especially with relatives-in-law and princes." (Evans-Pritchard: 1937, p. 164) Asante witchcraft thus differs from Fipa of Tanzania, where the Kamcape witch finding cult investigated primarily "general and social, rather than inter-personal conflicts within a village community." (Willis: 1968, p. 10) Witchcraft and its detection in Asante also have little in common with Cewa notions of normative behavior and its enforcement through mystical means. (Marwick: 1965) Asante witchcraft also differs from infant death syndromes as discovered in Mexico. (Nutini and Roberts: 1993)

The cults did create and present to members new forms of religious and medical experience and organization. All forms of religious and medical innovation within witch finding cults contained cultural precedent from Asante history. They did not, however, solely replicate historical patterns. Rather, they were "alternating markers of the old and new, acting like templates which are at each crisis redrawn, if only slightly." (Parkin: 1991, p. 30)

In the details of cult administration, in the forms of bodily practice and requisitioning of power, we must revise what has been generally understood about the individual within Asante society and history, and to some degree Asante religion. We must take a second look at individual capacities of "making history," (Borofsky: 1987; Wiener: 1995), and at the place of agency in everyday life.

The approach taken in this thesis to witchcraft and witch finding in Asante shares much in common with that pioneered by Evans-Pritchard. Witchcraft in Africa explains, and acts upon, the misfortunes and inequalities of rudimentary existence. The foundation for witchcraft explanation was derived from lived experiences of specific and identifiable individuals within the village, the lineage or even the state. Speculations of witchcraft were set in motion by crisis, catastrophe, betrayal, ruin, illness, dissembling, and especially death. Lived experiences involving misfortune were part of every day life in Asante. Thus, Assimeng, a Ghanaian, has noted that occurrences of witchcraft in contemporary Ghana arise most frequently in conditions of tension and anxiety. Witchcraft suspicion is related to:

> instability in a vast set of everyday social relationships: marriage, family,

> employment, court cases, police apprehensions, and even — in modern corruption-happy West Africa — in the search for what might be described as a "magico-spiritual cover" in cases of contraband adventures. For instance, it is believed that the most propitious days on which to travel with contraband goods across the borders of a country can be determined by a witch doctor. (Assimeng: 1989, p. 180)

In Asante, like Azande, "witchcraft beliefs also embrace a system of values which regulate human conduct." (Evans-Pritchard: 1937, p. 63) Witchcraft in Asante was thus mediated along the lines of the most prevalent issues of daily life: food, health, wealth and accumulation, harvest, birth, and death. As in other African locales, Asante witchcraft was a condition of reassessment and accusation at times of pragmatic uncertainty.

> The Zande actualizes [his] beliefs rather than intellectualizes them, and their tenets are expressed in socially controlled behavior rather than in doctrines. Hence the difficulty of discussing the subject of witchcraft with Azande, for their ideas are imprisoned in action. (Evans-Pritchard: 1937, p. xviii)

These conditions of witchcraft in Africa were quite unlike those of early modern Europe, where the witch formed part of a larger theology of grand deities and their anti-heroes. In that scheme, witches thwarted the ways of god. They appeared as mockeries of deity and the moral order more than as interfering with a harvest of cocoa, or the reason for recent infant deaths within a particular lineage. Clark confirms this point. Speaking of witchcraft in early modern Europe, he said:

> Witchcraft is the sixth and sovereign degree of atheism (after hypocrisy, temporizing, inconstancy, vice, and rejection of an afterlife of divine judgements) and the Antichrist is therefore not merely the greatest atheist bu the greatest witch and magician. (Clark: 1997, p. 387)

Chapter IV outlined conditions in the mid-nineteenth century which precipitated the rise of the first documented movement of witch finders. Membership of ɔdomaŋkama numbered in the thousands, while its leadership was limited to around a dozen

persons. In defilement of the authority of Mensa Bonsu, ɔdomaŋkama attempted to replicate institutions of the state, its court and priesthood. Cult members thereby presumed political and mystical powers inherent in these societal functions. At the same time, the cult denied the legitimacy of the state, its rights to govern, and its descent from mythical, ancestral figures. With power abrogated to its leadership, the cult was able to establish new rules of behavior, and ascertain who was a witch.

In other areas of Africa, these privileges were commonly recognized as part of the calling of a prophet, a healer, or one chosen or endowed with supernatural abilities of discernment. (Johnson: 1994; Fernandez: 1982) Typical of such manifestations is the calling and mystically endowed capacity to establish alternative beliefs and prescribed behavior. These may include rules, laws, precepts, and authority to regulate village concerns. Within the Apostles Revelation Society, a prophetic church in Ewe, a pragmatic agenda existed along with visionary precepts. "A kind of entrepreneurial ethic is, thus, not neglected. In the midst of spirituality, there is practical prayer." (Fernandez: 1970, p. 258) Because this authority moves upon specific persons, their oration is received with great legitimacy. Their rules are often regarded with greater force than those of society at large. In this manner, ɔdomaŋkama resembled the witch finding cult known as kabenga-benga of the Kasai region of Central Africa. Mary Douglas notes how the cult, "superseded all existing ritual offices and rites. It was supposed to cancel completely the existing ritual order...The only valid prohibitions and rules were those promulgated by the new experts...They had the power to initiate others." (Douglas: 1963, p. 247)

We have seen how Asante witch finding cults created new social institutions

and rules based upon their own imagined world. Indeed, this pattern extended into the twentieth century when the cults continued to construct elaborate sets of rules and prohibitions for cult members. As the cults proliferated in numbers, new rules were created. New forms of healing were laid down.

A sense of mythical legitimacy and power accompanied the cults, their rules and their healing powers. Those who "drank fetish," and who abided by the rules would be protected from harm and the misfortunes of witchcraft. This precise point was noted by Audrey Richards in her study of Bamucapi, a witch finding shrine in Zambia in 1934. Richards claimed the "efficacy of the medicine depended on the keeping of a number of taboos." (Richards: 1935, p. 451) As in Asante, other writers have noted that "drinking fetish" would result in the immediate death of a witch if they returned to their witchcraft. (Marwick: 1950, p. 100; Nukunya: 1969, p. 3)

By implication, those who did not "drink fetish" were subject to all the blows and misfortune nature or the wild may inflict. By extension, a person's lineage and village would also be affected. Mythical realities which made cult healing of the body a pragmatic occurrence were, as we have seen, based upon reformed and recreated precepts of Asante history and cosmology. Religious and medical imagination denied the power of the state and its historical authority. In its place came the force and power of witch finding movements which healed the body of illness. Medicines within the cults contained the identifying capacity to isolate witchcraft. Shrines were then known to have the power of cleansing individuals who drank the "fetish" medicines, thereby purging communities of intrusive and evil effects of witches. Entailments of Asante life in later nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries thus prescribed a new form of engagement with the world, one which created its own sources of power and its own interpretations of history. Life in early twentieth century Asante is described in this quote by Debrunner. He cites an Asante chief who noted the effects of western development on the tenuous relationship between man and spirits.

> If our tribe is degenerating, our fame declining and the former splendor of our kingdom vanishing — when does it come, if not from the wrath of the tutelar spirits and the anger of the ancestors! How can they bless us, is we no longer send messengers to them into the nether world to talk to them about all that troubles our heart! No wonder if the blessing of the tutelar spirits no longer reaches us — the thunder of the big guns had chased them, the noise of the Church bells does not please them; they are caught in the wires of the telephone, if they want to come to our help — no wonder, therefore, if there are more and more evil men and if the number of witches increases terribly, and if the power of our magic charms loses its potency. (Debrunner: 1961, p. 66)

In these witch finding movements, the overwhelming attention to treating, healing and medicating the body provides an essential ingredient to their character as capable of creating power and mediating history. The question is not why witch finding was conceivable and purposeful to Asante in the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, but how it could be carried out despite desires to the contrary of both the Asante state and British colonial government.

Dupuis described in 1820 an unsuccessful attempt to dethrone the king and mystically transform the kingdom. Such endeavors were not unimaginable earlier in Asante life. But in 1879, it was the body -- the capacity to control and enable the human form, not the "mind," which set apart these witch finding movements as creative sources of power. They became powerfully endowed to do more than effect a "restitution of an "ethical" truth abandoned." (McCaskie: 1995, p. 253) Rather, they were capable of recreating and

reinterpreting the Asante past and its historic foundations.

The curative rites of healing, of witch cleansing, and the pronouncements of cult leaders were tested historically. As noted by Bloch, it was a case in which the "past in the present is then challenged by the present." (Bloch: 1989, p. 15) Edicts and performances of witch-finders were validated by events of the times. They were validated not only by current developments, understood by all as conditions of inequality and misfortune--the stuff of witchcraft, but by current understandings and reinterpretations of what were viewed as essential paradigms of the Asante past. The Asante past, including its mythical and stately foundation, were recreated in the present. The past was recreated according to conditions under which Asante experienced life in the 1870s and afterwards.

Healing of the body in witch finding cults addressed eighteenth and nineteenth century reassessments of history. Rituals of witch finding were rejections of state authority over the individual and its control of the body. Cult precepts and rules surrounding healing rites were elaborated to cult members as expositions of authority and accountability. Sanctions for disregarding the rules included recurring illnesses or death by witchcraft. Compliance to rules and rites of a cult resulted in protection, health, prosperity, and refuge from assailment by witches. Through curative performances of the individual, witch finding cults thus challenged the state's capacities to regulate basic conditions of life: birth, health, wealth, and death. In this manner, rituals of healing in witch finding cults may be considered as forms of historical discourse, both regarding history and within history. They may also be viewed as creating new forms of interaction between abosom and humans.

Witch finding in Asante was largely not millennial in ideology. There was

no moral reformation of everyday life, nor a restoration of any "primitive" order. These elements were present in other religious movements in Africa at the time, (Comaroff: 1985, p. 179) and in other witch finding cults (Douglas: 1963, p. 247; Willis: 1970). However, there was a revival of power seen to be abused and controverted by the state. Leaders of ɔdomaŋkama sought to embody the authority of Komfo Anokye. They pursued its legitimization in daily concerns of Asante existence, and made it accessible to more than the limited political elite.

Witch finding shrines and medicines entered Asante over a period of many decades from several different geographic regions. The shrines gained the sponsorship of new indigenous bourgeoisie and gathered large support in every village and community they entered. Shrines were imported from the north, indicating influences of Islam, and from coastal areas, implying long standing relations with Christianity. By combining elements of Asante religion — notably characters of the forest like abosom and sasabonsam -- with features of Islam and Christianity, the cults familiarized themselves across religious, ethnic and political boundaries. Like other migrating religions in Africa, the cults spread well beyond their original territories and became established in foreign lands amid local political and religious turmoil. Blurring of religious precepts, and the importation of foreign creeds into Asante indicated the utilization of new sources of mystical power to address anxieties within local politics. Foreign creeds, medicines and deities introduced new sources of power into existing tensions. As has been noted for the spread of the atinga witch finding cult in Yoruba, the cult achieved success "partly by identifying itself as foreign and *beyond* entrenched local categories." (Matory: 1994, p. 75)

Witch finding cults in Asante addressed political and religious anxieties through idioms which were historically precise. Douglas Johnson has recently argued that Nuer divinities were historical figures because they were associated with, and identified through, historical persons. These prophets were either contemporary or had lived only a generation or two prior to his work in the Sudan. Nuer belief in and experiences with divinities was only described through associations with these historical persons. Thus, divinities were known only through their prophets. Nuer linked divinities "with a face, a body, a voice, and physical actions: the face and body of the prophet, the divinity's voice as it spoke through the prophet's mouth, and the prophet's actions when seized." (Johnson: 1994, p. 332) Any description of Nuer divinities which did not include this indisputable connection with historical, embodied individuals could not capture the true character of the divinities and their powers among humans.

In pre-colonial Asante, abosom were likewise associated with historical events and with living embodied persons: the asantehene in the case of odwira performances, and akɔmfoɔ in the case of shrines. Abosom were figures of the wild. Their ambiguity was well known. As mentioned, the powers of abosom were especially renown at times of war when their shrines were consulted by the king himself. These powers had great positive effects ensuring victory in battle. Shrines captured in battle or brought into Asante by immigration were likewise relegated to kingly pilgrimages during periods of military conquest.

Most abosom held powers of dangerous potentiality over humans because of their origins in and associations with nature. They were especially known as agents which

inflicted illness and healed diseases. Moreover, powers of Asante ancestors were made particularly resonant and pervasive during annual performances of odwira, itself having the essence of a sumaŋ, when the Asantahene visited the royal mausoleum and touched each of the skulls of the dead kings. Mystical and political powers of the state were reinforced through this association. It was exclusively through the king that Asante made ritual connections with royal ancestry of the state. Moreover, only through deceased royalty were living Asante associated with the mythical founders of the state: Osei Tutu and Komfo Anokye. Throughout centuries of Asante rule, and even predating the state, presence of abosom in Akan was well established. Their individual capacities and personalities were well understood.

The attribution of the words and virtues of Komfo Anokye to modern times was not an exercise in soothsaying or hariolation. In the nineteenth century, the perceived theme of the founders of the Asante state remained an abiding concern for the moral actions of individuals, communities and the entire state. Reinvoked powers and embodied identities by members of ɔdomaŋkama indicated the identification and accusation for the evil things people were doing, not just those things which had done in the past. If he had the knowledge to know what was wrong, he also had the capacities to rectify it.

Witch finding cults thus began in Asante with the importation of mythical powers and identities from another time period. This period was their own historic past, and it echoed the idyllic conditions of harmony under which the state was first erected and under which it existed for generations. The cults continued into the twentieth century with the importation of powers and healing abilities from foreign lands. (Fiawoo: 1966) These

regions were not distant; but they were believed to possess the mystically and medicinally precise abilities to heal and to neutralize effects of witches. Even in 1945, an informant told Fortes that cults were imported from Wa and other areas in the Northern Territories because they were more successful than Asante in abating witchcraft. "I shall be going to the Northern Territories (some village near Wa) to see a man there who has medicines to cure barrenness and ahonhon (elephantiasis.)" (MF: ASSM, 1945g)

These movements thus originated on the periphery of state powers and political authority. They illustrate what is regarded in anthropology as a "creativity of power" by their denial of a central source of power and by an assumption of the very authority which is controlled at the center. They did so in attempts to create and recreate "new forms of experience and activity." (Arens and Karp: 1989, xix) Moreover, the cults continued into the twentieth century in response to a world which had been "penetrated, subordinated, destroyed, or absorbed, first by the growing market and subsequently by industrial capitalism." (Wolf: 1982, p. 23) Chief emissaries of this expanding Empire were employees of the Wesleyan Methodist Society and district commissioners who were persuaded to prosecute cult participants. The colonial moment in Asante formally arose in 1896; but its engagement had been culturally present for well over a century. Beginning with the corrupt reign of Kwaka Dua Panin, Asante non-elite were truly a "people without history" in West Africa. In these conditions, witchcraft and witch finding in Asante were truly a means of "political discourse." (Geschiere: 1997) But they were equally a means of historic discourse.

Historically and medicinally they treated the body as a diseased and corrupted

vessel. By recreating historic precepts in ritual, these persons demonstrated their capacities to act, not simply to be acted upon. They responded by doing the rite thing. They recreated the past to fit conditions of the present. In this manner, they were a group of persons who, through their rituals, were able to "think and feel -- sense -- nature and themselves in certain ways and with certain imagery." (Barth: 1987, p. 79) Witch finding cults of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrated new methods of (re)creating history. They also confirmed that in Asante where there is history there is also power.

**72. Personhood and Power**

The dialectic between historical actors and the structure of culture is an area of current review in anthropological literature. In 1937, Evans-Pritchard realized the importance of the individual in Azande divination and witchcraft. He notes how the interpretation of dreams is a common element in comprehending the meaning of witchcraft. However, dreams were considered something private, and their topics were often not interpreted according to a stock set of standards. Rather, they were "given meaning in relation to individual circumstances." The individual created meaning of the dreams by selecting which interpretations applied in his or her circumstances. In this process, "a man selects from stock interpretations what suits his individual circumstances and twists accepted interpretations to meet his special requirements." (Evans-Pritchard: 1937, p. 135)

The example shows the discretionary options of individuals involved in a system of witchcraft, albeit one which lacks regional or historic description. Contemporary writers who speak of community forces as agents for meaningful interpretation often place the person or the social network within frameworks of historic and regional or global

interaction.

Foremost among such writers in the United States is Marshall Sahlins. His writings on Hawaiian history deny world systems theory by showing how dominating Western markets took on salience and power not by economic forces, but only as local cultural schemes of the recipient communities gave meaning to expanding economies. (Sahlins: 1981; 1990) Ortner has also shown how local actors in Nepal used the products of a world system to create their own enactments of power, rather than replicate positions of powerlessness imposed by a rising capitalist economy. (Ortner: 1990) Kaplan also notes Fijian responses to colonial powers, and how these articulations made sense locally of foreign encroachment, but were viewed by the British only as "cults" of displaced peoples. (Kaplan: 1995)

These authors illustrate one of the most prevalent themes in contemporary anthropology: the capacity of communities to (re)create local culture and of individuals to demonstrate personal expression even within—and sometimes because of--imposing hegemonic regimes. Such regimes include the dense relations of gender and of colonialism. Most prevalent in many such studies have been the concepts of personhood.

These concepts demonstrate the power of individual actors who fulfill the dimensions of expected social roles, but who also show remarkable abilities to withdraw from those roles and create an existence which is highly personal and intensely self-aware. Egyptian Bedouin women, for example, maintain an existence which is public and social. Discourse of this realm is "one of hostility, bitterness, and anger...militant indifference and denial of concern." Their poetic discourse of the personal, to the contrary, expresses love,

"attachment and deep feeling." (Abu-Lughod: 1986, p. 187) One discourse is strictly separated from the other through imposing hierarchies of gender relations. Thus, hegemony operates through "all signs and practices taken for granted as natural, universal and true." (Comaroff and Comaroff: 1992, p. 28)

Elaborating on this notion, Weiner has recently written that wherever there is culture, there is also some forms of hegemony. These includes aesthetic, ethical, and moral standards, as well as cultural criteria for what is considered desirable, reasonable, and possible. "In short, hegemony involves the power to define what people take as real." (Weiner: 1995, p. 151)

Anthropologists recognize a movement of individuals between structure and event, or between social and cultural stipulations and the meanings of actors and their own lived experiences. This movement is identified by recognized features of each domain. In the Bedouin instance, it is language. In many African societies south of the Sahara, this

s noted at a recen movement is marked by spatial and bodily orientations. This transition wa t

conference on African folk models.

> As people leave the public scene of their own social living unit and go into the bush, or to the town, or to a ritual dance on the outskirts of the village, they are free to create their own world, and to express their muted feelings about how they relate to other people (or to spirits in another realm of existence). They become experiencing actors, rather than mere parts of a culturally defined structure of objective social categories. (Jacobson-Widding: 1991, p. 44)

Nevertheless, language and idioms of given cultural contexts and of structure are often used by actors who express subjectivity and personal experiences. This transition is made possible by the dynamic continuum which involves relations between persons, and

which connects human persons with forces of nature and with supernatural entities such as spirits or deities.

The orderly universe of Asante precipitated a cause for every event. In Asante history, cosmology ruled out purely random occurrences. Accidents were mere unanticipated fulfillment of personal ɔkrabea, or destiny. What may seem as luck or coincidence to the Western mind was the unfolding of destiny in Asante.

The natural world was endowed with varying degrees of force or power. As noted in chapter two, this force was suman. This aspect of being was identifiable in human persons also. Suman were also identified as extensions of abosom. Thus, human persons were directly linked with forces of nature and with supernatural powers. As found elsewhere in West Africa, "the fortunes of the individual are inextricably bound up with relations with kinsmen, friends, mentors, neighbors, strangers, ancestors, God, and other beings." (Jackson: 1982, p. 19)

This cosmology created endless dilemmas. As argued throughout this thesis, Asante history was grounded in the constructive opposition between community or culture and nature. Community and nature were irreconcilable opposites in both ideology and everyday existence. What consisted in one realm was found in opposition within the other. As argued, the essence of the human community was the matrilineage, or abusua. This man-made form was located within a settlement, which was, in turn, found within the broader domain of culture. In opposition to this construct was the domain of nature. It was represented by the forest or wild, and by entities which invoked chaos within the world. Forces of the wild were ever disposed to overthrow and abolish culture.

As outlined above, this cosmology was given spatial representation in Asante settlements. Kurotia was the boundary between community and forest. It was neither culture nor bush. Most importantly, as noted, it provided a corridor for transactions and movement between the two realms. This fringe area contained those elements of culture which were marginal, potentially dangerous and powerful, and anomalies of any sort. Aspects of the wild which entered culture did so through the corridor of kurotia.

Witch finding shrines were particularly prevalent at the fringe area of villages. Such a cosmological vantage point provided both a shield to the community and an immediate access to, and control against, forces of the bush. A report from 1922 noted the precision of shrine placements within two cults of the time. "The shrine of the "Aberewa" was similar in appearance and structure to that of the "Fwe-me-so;" but whereas that of the former was built on the outskirts of the town, that of the latter is invariably situated in the most central part." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243) Data in this thesis support the West African concept that personhood is created within this marginal spatial domain of society.

By extension, data also has shown that the importing of medicines and shrines from foreign territories into the boundaries of Asante also brings with them new and untrammeled sources of power. Thus, in 1922, one instance of Hwe me so was "purchased by one Kobina Nyankumagu, a native of Ashanti but resident in the Northern Territories." (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1243)

Erection of shrines at the "outskirts" of towns and villages indicated the capacity of persons to extract powers from and commune with forces of the wild. The bush signified a world of witchcraft and of evil forces such as embodied in sasabonsam. It

encapsulated clandestine behaviors. It represented wild energies and was inimical to community.

However, the bush also represented its own domain of danger. It signified a spatial domain in which persons created power, and where they may go beyond the roles and statuses which constituted their social identity. Indeed, it is the spatial arena in which a person may ritually cast out unwanted evil forces and where he or she may medicinally counteract physical symptoms of witchcraft. As such, it was an area of profound personal sensibilities and creativity. African metaphors of human capacity, of personal experience, and of bodily "habitus" extend social existence into the bush. The bush was considered beyond the limits of known social boundaries and cultural limits; but it was, in reality, internal to its own workings. In African society, it represents the power of individual imagination, intelligence, capacity, creativity, and sensibilities. These forces help reinvent the social order. They give it authenticity; and they help reestablish social relations and human presence within a cosmology which is unremittingly wretched and dangerous.

As witches were literally and metaphorically perceived as sources of terror transported from the wild into society at times of tremendous social discontinuity, witches were also seen as destructive sources of abusua, and thus of one's own ɔkra. As noted, continuity of Asante life depended upon the perpetuation of the state and of the matrilineage. It also depended upon the capacity of the individual to find his or her own destiny within these organizations.

At times of social discontinuity and anxiety from the mid-nineteenth century and through colonialism, the Asante state and the abusua appeared to be threatened by forces

which contained the ability to annihilate the existence of either one. All Asante witnessed the predation of the state and the expansion of western economies, education, monogamous marriage, colonial overrule, and colonial evangelism. From 1850 and beyond, these forces levied great liabilities within Asante state and society, and within the lives of individual Asante. These occurrences were seen as historical events brought about by forces both internal and external to society.

In the course of such predation, individuals became less defined by the roles and statuses connected with the traditional elementary structures of kinship and within the hierarchy of the state. Corporate identity eroded. Role playing of persons in lineages and villages was under stress. Similar conditions have been noted in Central Africa. As in Asante, a similar response ensued. "All this may be assumed to affect his sense of individual selfhood. If a person is at a loss regarding his intrinsic value as an individual, an appropriate way to express this feeling may be to resort to metaphors connoting elusiveness, lack of distinction, lack of continuity, lack of substance, or, in short, uncertainty." (Jacobson-Widding: 1990, pp. 55-56)

In this context, symbolism of the body and ritual healing of illness rehearsed historic dimensions of power. Rites of healing revealed witchcraft and often implicated the witch. Powers which made these rites efficacious were extractions from traditional cosmology and history. Ritual attempts to neutralize witchcraft and to turn the power of bayi on its head, (Kapferer: 1983) also intended to transform the victims and reinstate their identities as persons in society. These transformation include the medicinal and ritual recreation of a personhood. Rituals of witch finding movements in Asante, in particular the

meaning of illness, may be interpreted as expressions of personal experience. It has been argued that the body and its symptoms of disease thus represented particular forms of individual and personal engagement with the world.

Attempts to ritually heal the body in witch finding cults were unrelenting in their pursuits, becoming commercialized, evasive, clandestine, ubiquitous, and resistant within a colonial order which showed little tolerance for their existence. Thus, in attempts to survive the 1922 Order for its extermination, the Hwe me so cult divided and multiplied into at least 20 different forms carrying as many different names of new cults. (NAG: A.D.M., 11/1243)

In conclusion, personhood and power involve creative engagement upon the world, and upon specific social and historic realities. Historic conditions constrain individual creative capacities; and social settings may limit — or even attempt to regulate — the use of creative energies. Moreover, no one makes the world out of nothing. However, each individual attempts to live in social and historic realities through creative circumstances of their own choosing. The world is thereby transformed as if it were of his or her own doing.

Terms of engagement and creativity, and capacities for power are part of life in all societies. In West Africa, these capacities extended beyond the here and now into a mystical and supernatural existence. They also included critical cultural notions of the person. They became the means for coping with, and disengaging from, the harsh and often anomalous conditions of people's lives. Like other West African societies, Asante forms of creativity and agency involved movement between community and the bush, between culture

and nature. This movement reaffirmed Asante history; although, as we have seen, history may be creatively transformed into myth.

Asante evocations of nature demonstrate that the viability and continuity of every collective social order rests upon the capacities, initiatives and creativity of individual persons. We are also reminded that such initiatives and creativity often occasion demonstrations of power within wider social and cultural contexts, and that power is never simply a centralized phenomenon. Historic and anthropological investigations which minimally regard such contingencies in the lives of individual persons may offer studies which enrich our understanding of institutions. But these same studies may isolate populations by disregarding the more universal character of human experiences.

The argument presented in the thesis is intended to overcome that schism. By use of history, I have argued that individuals within communities in West Africa constructed personhood by recreating values and symbols inherited from the past to an indeterminate existence in the present. From 1879 to 1945, Asante showed how personhood and power provided a dynamic model for transitions between the pre-colonial past and the colonial present. Healing rituals within witch-finding cults stressed continuities between the present and a glorious past of which all Asante were intimately familiar. The example of Asante witch finding cults demonstrates that persons create methods of realignment with the world even in oppressive conditions; that such adjustments are often made by utilizing cultural and historic precepts; and where there is witch finding, there is also history.

## Glossary

abayisem or bayi: Witchcraft.

bogya: Literally, "blood." Includes all human persons related to one another by the same mother or within the same household. Bogya is inherited through the matrilineage.

abosom: Derived from abo, or stone, and som, "to be a servant of." Abosom were given place in Asant cosmology as deities below onyame; but they are also identified as the "fetishes" of shrines in the pre-colonial state. Abosom have great power which is derived from onyame and the cosmos in general. Some abosom directed their power to certain prescribed function: the state, the king, etc.

abusua: Matrilineage; descent and kinship through matrifiliation. The abusua is the maximal lineage.

aduro: Medicine.

honhom: Human body.

hyɛbea: Derived from hyɛ, "to set", and bea, "the way of doing something. Ordained destiny given to human persons by onyame.

akonkoɔ: Wealthy persons who acquired commodities, clothing, houses and other entrapments of colonialism.

ɔkra: Often translated as "soul" of a human person, ɔkra is issued directly by onyame, although it is also said to travel through the matrilineage, but may also come in part from the father. The concept implies a message sent from deity. As such its components existed prior to birth and survive after death. Death brings the separation of the body from ɔkra.

ɔkrabea: A component of the human person derived from onyame known as one's own personal destiny. The conduct, experience and direction of a person's life reveal one's ɔkrabea.

ɔkɔmfɔ: (Pl. akɔmfoɔ) Literally, "one who is possessed." Widely recognized as "fetish man" or "fetish priest." One who serves and carries out the desires of

abosom.

kurotia: Marginal cultural and geographic boundary at the edge of a village, kurotia represented the transition between the human community (culture) and the wild (nature.) Beyond kurotia were the dangerous entities and powers of the forest, including witches.

mmoatia: Fairies or little people of the forest. They were half human half monkey, and served as messengers between culture and nature.

anibue: A term applied to wealth Asante during early colonialism, it literally meant "being civilized."

odwira: An annual festival of the state, derived from dwira, "to cleanse or purify."

ntɔrɔ: A basic component of personhood identifying patrifiliation and even specific patrilineages. Traditionally there were nine ntɔrɔ. Members also shared in rituals of purification.

onipa ne pe: Free will or agency of human persons.

onyame: The absentee creator of the world. Deity with ultimate powers.

osikani: "Rich men" who acquired their wealth through colonial enterprises.

asamando: Land of the dead.

asamanfo: Ancestral spirits. These were sources of power and could use it for harm or blessing.

sasa: Sense of justice found in all persons.

sasabonsam: Diabolic and demonic forest creature. A servant of abosom, sasabonsam instigates harmful actions against humans, including bayi.

sika dwa kofi: Literally, Golden Stool of Friday. This was the embodiment of the soul of all Asante, and the emblem of the powers of the king.

sika mena: Literally, Gold Elephant Tail. Symbolized the appropriation of wealth, especially gold, at its highest level, the king.

asikafo: Asante trader or businessmen who made his trade and wealth through ties with British commodities.

asumaŋ: Charms, amulets, talismans, all of which maintained prescribed and expected functions, and all displayed evidences and embodiments of power of Asante cosmology.

sunsum: An immaterial element which determines the character of a thing or human person. It predisposed some persons toward hostility or illness.

atɔperɛ: Literally "dance of death," a ritual execution of those guilty of heinous crimes against the state or king, such as adultery with a wife of the king.

tiboa: Human conscience.

Appendix #1
Witch Finding Shrines in Asante

The following shrine names were taken from the National Archives of Ghana. The name of the shrine is listed, followed by the estimated date of origin or date of entrance into Asante. The date is taken from the earliest known correspondence dealing with the shrine. In cases where documents were not dated, no date is listed. Place of origin is taken from the document. Place names were usually written by a British administrator required to investigate the legality of shrines at a particular village. Their investigations often involved interviewing shrine priests or shrine adherents, who provided places or origin when these were outside of Asante.

| **Shrine Name** | **Date of entrance into Asante or Date or origin** | **Place of origin** |
|---|---|---|
| Kukuro | 1731 | Brong/Techiman |
| Dente | 19th Century | Krachi |
| ɔdomaŋkama | 1879 | Kumase |
| Aberewa | 1906 | Near Wa, (N.T.) |
| Kunde | 1908? | Ivory Coast, or N.T. |
| Yibol | 1912 | Volta Region |
| Konaman Yaviko | 1912 | Volta Region |
| Senya Gupo | 1916 | Bole, (N.T.) |
| Nkona | 1917 | Ivory Coast |
| Bompata | 1918 | Ivory Coast |
| Hwe me so | 1918? | Near Wa, |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | (N.T.) |
| Gyemi ("Save me") | 1918 | Baduwa |
| Tigare | 1918? | Mampare, (N.T.) |
| Tongo | 1920? | Tong Hills, (N.T.) |
| Danguire | 1920 | Gyakyi (Asante) |
| Brahua | 1922 | Essiasie (Asante) |
| Anhwire ("Not losing") | 1926 | Twifu |
| Nangoro | 1930s | Bekwai (Asante) |
| Dismona | 1930s | Jansoso (Asante) |
| Odikpo | 1930s | N.T. |
| Nyafa | ? | Ewe, Volta |

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NAG: National Archives of Ghana (Accra, Cape Coast, Kumase)

WMMS: Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society Archives (London)

C.H.P.: Charles Harper Papers, Rhodes House (Oxford)

HA: History of Asante (Kumase)

TP: Tigare pamplet (Kumase)

BMA: Basel Mission Archives (Switzerland)

EMP: Eva Meyerowitz Papers (Herskovitz Library, Northwestern University)

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