

# MINING AS A FACTOR OF SOCIAL CONFLICT IN GHANA

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**Post-colonial Africa has witnessed a phenomenal increase in conflicts mostly arising out of disagreements over a variety of issues including land, chieftaincy, resource allocation, environmental degradation etc. The West African sub-region has had its fair share of these upheavals notably in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and La Côte d'Ivoire. Ghana is among the few countries in West Africa perceived to be an oasis of peace in a region otherwise characterised by civil wars, rebel activities and general instability. But this image about Ghana only masks a festering wound of communal violence, inter-ethnic conflicts and armed confrontations in the Northern part of the country. The root causes of these conflicts which have almost become persistent are largely traceable to the introduction of secular political authority (Chieftaincy) in areas which before colonisation were said to be stateless or acephalous. This article argues that northern Ghana is not the only place in the country where conflicts erupted or occurred and that the quest for resource control in the Gold and diamond impregnated areas in the south was also a factor of social conflicts in Ghana during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. This paper's primary concern is to interrogate related issues and explore the prevailing debates.**

**Key Words:** Ghana, conflicts, gold, diamond, mining, disputes.

## Introduction

Since the beginning of recorded history, gold has played a very important role in the world economic and social order. (Ayensu, 1998). Gold compares with all that is elegant and precious, hence the demand for it has been great and men have stopped almost at nothing to acquire it. People of all races and ranks have given their lives for it and for the wealth and power that it promises to bring. It is a prized possession in all countries, in all cultures and in all the ages of history. (Ayensu, 1998). People have always prized gold as the most valuable commodity because of the worth which is attached to it as an article of ornamentation and also because of its conventional value as a basis for currency.

Gold mining has had a long history in Africa. (Junner, 1935; Hopkins, 1973; Songsore et. Al., 1994) Africa is the world's largest producer of gold (Agbesinyale, 2003), and according to estimations by Maponga, the continent hosts 30 percent of world reserve base. (Akabzaa et. al, 2007) After the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand district of the Transvaal region of South Africa in 1886, mining operations grew continually from the 1890s and South Africa is now the world's largest producer of gold. (Illife, 1995; Agbesinyale, 2003) West Africa in particular has been a major gold mining area for many centuries with activities dating back to the beginning of the fifth century. (Junner, 1935; Boahen, 1966; Keita, 2001) The earliest available records indicate that the forest peoples of

modern Ghana mined gold for several centuries before the Portuguese landed on the Guinea Coast of West Africa.

Known as the Gold Coast under British colonial rule, the country is fairly richly endowed with the precious metal. With the onset of colonisation by the British Empire and attendant resource-driven export-oriented economy, vast areas of the then Gold Coast were acquired by various prospectors for exploration. The colonial government, having prioritised mining as a major economic activity, vigorously pursued a policy that sought to enhance the role of mining in the various satellite colonies and the need for mineral resources to feed the industrial establishment in the British Empire. (Nyame *et al.*, 2009) The auriferous areas that attracted the mining companies were Tarkwa in the Wassa district, Obuasi in Adanse, Konongo in Asante and the Akyem Abuakwa traditional area in the Eastern region. The latter state is not only a gold impregnated area but also diamondiferous (Junner, 1958). It is again worthy of noting that the control of these mineral resources has been a source of social conflict in Southern Ghana in the past and in contemporary Ghanaian society and this study will also delve into the issues surrounding this phenomenon.

## Methodology

This paper was written primarily with the utilisation of primary source archival data from the Public Records and Archives Administration (PRAAD) of the Republic of Ghana. In this regard, the PRAAD office of the national capital, Accra, the capital of the Eastern Region, Koforidua and the capital of the richest mining region in Ghana, that of Kumasi in the Ashanti Region were extensively consulted. Besides, the researcher also reviewed and made use of published literature on mining in Ghana to cross-check, evaluate and supplement the archival and oral data collected. These were in the form of journal articles and books.

## Context

Even though this paper generally discusses the overall contribution of mining activities to conflict creation throughout Ghana, it is imperative to highlight some key areas within the southern Akan forest regions of the country where most of the gold production and for that matter mineral extractive industries come from. According to Clark (1994), more than 90 percent of gold production in Ghana comes from the underground mines in western Ashanti Region, with the remainder coming from alluvial deposits in the same region and the Central region of the country. Therefore the context of this paper is focused on Adanse in Asante, Wassa and Akim Abuakwa in the Western and Eastern regions of the country respectively.

Known in traditional Akan cosmogony as the place where God started the creation of the world, the Adanse state emerged probably during the twelfth century AD. (Buah, 1980; Ward, 1966; Reindorf, 1966). Adanse was one of the first states to emerge from the Akan forest in Ghana. Between the Akwamu Empire and Adanse, the latter is the elder but it lacked the complex political and military organisation of the former. The name Adanse itself could mean 'house building', which would imply, according to one tradition, that the Adanse were the first people to build wattle-and-daub houses in Ghana (Ward, 1966). According to Dickson (1969), it is fairly certain that the Adanse were settled in their traditional area in the forest by the end of the sixteenth century. Their settlements were sited, for purposes of defence, on the Kwisa and Moinsi hills between the Fum and Oda rivers, and the capital was Adansimanso which was close to the modern village of Mansia between Fomena and Akrokyere. The Adanse were hemmed in by the Denkyira in the west, by the Akwamu in the east and south and by the Ashanti and Brong in the north. (Dickson, 1969)

Before the appearance of the Europeans on the Gold Coast in 1471, the Adanse people were already proficient in gold mining. From 1482 till the end of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese established themselves at Elmina, building a castle and trading European goods for gold from Adanse (Arhin, 1978). In 1601, Muller was

probably referring to Adanse gold when he stated that it was in the rich mountains in the interior that the best gold sold on the coast could be found (Perbi, 2004).

The contemporary Adanse state is located south of Bekwai in Asante territory. It shares a common frontier with the Pra river down south and to the east, it is bordered by the Banka and Asante-Akyem peoples while its western borderline is shared with Denkyira. The population of the state as at the 1984 population census of Ghana was around 233,902 (Ghana Population Census, 1984). Today, the Adanse people inhabit the mountainous lands of Twisa and Moinsi. Much of Adanse land consists of a dense luxuriant tropical forest. The state enjoys a good amount of rainfall and possesses some of the best agricultural lands in Ghana (Ofosu-Mensah, 1999). In the pre-colonial era, the vast stretches of land were exploited mainly for hunting, subsistence agricultural production and gold mining (Bowdich, 1817).

Another auriferous area in Ghana is Wassa. Of the four or five main auriferous kingdoms of the Akan region – Asante, Denkyira, Akyem and Adanse – the political history of Wassa is relatively shrouded in obscurity. The region known as Wassa or Warsha – “a land rich in gold” – had been well known since Portuguese times and its location had been specified in the famous Dutch map of the 1620s (Dumett, 1987) Contrary to earlier assumptions by Meyerowitz, (1952) we now know that the two modern states of Wassa Amenfi and Wassa Fiase did not exist during the first three centuries of the gold trade, but were, in fact, the results of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century developments.

The original heartland of Wassa lay north of River Bonsa, south of the Ofin, east of the Ankobra and west of the Bosompra River; it was situated further inland and covered a smaller expanse of territory than the two modern Wassa states. Wassa was bounded on the south-west by the state of Gwira, which also contained rich goldfields and on the south by Ahanta. Old Wassa never attained the status of a structured kingdom such as that of Akwamu or Denkyira, let alone Asante. It did not develop a large disciplined army, a centralised government, or a network of administrators who could settle disputes or collect taxes in tributary areas. Indeed, we read of independent abirempon controlling the politics of Wassa in the early 1700s, two centuries after the Portuguese described it as an important mining region. While Wassa possessed rich auriferous lands, its complex political history suggests that the desire of kings and chiefs to control gold mining was hardly a sufficient condition for the achievement of central consolidation. From the earliest centuries of European contact through to the nineteenth century, Wassa was described as a scantily populated, thickly-forested region, a state whose soil was not particularly fertile and where agriculture did

not flourish. One of the first direct references to Wassa is also one of the most revealing. Olefert Dapper, the Dutch chronicler, reported in the 1660s that “the inhabitants spend all their time mining and sow no grain, they are supplied [with food by their neighbours...].” (Dumett, 1987) There were few towns or large villages. Even in the richer mining areas, most of the people lived in small hamlets of three or four cottages. Later European sources confirmed that the Wassa people cultivated yams, a little rice, and other basic crops, but the sources also observed that like the Akyems, they were not very good farmers. Wassa is the area with the longest tradition of industrial gold mining in Ghana.

Modern Akyem territory comprises over 3,120 square miles of land (Population Census of Ghana, 1960) Its frontiers are marked by river Pra and Asante to the west, Asante Akyem and Kwawu to the north, New Dwaben and Krobo to the east, and Agona to the south. Modern Akyem consists of three sub-divisions: Abuakwa, Kotoku and Bosome. The largest subdivision, Abuakwa, occupies about two-thirds of Akyem territory (2) Kotoku and Bosome share the remaining one-third to the west. Traditions of the three sub-divisions point to Adanse as their aboriginal home. (Addo-Fening, 1988)

The thickly forested Atewa Range (also known as the Akyem Hills) is a prominent feature on the landscape of Akyem Abuakwa. The state's main source of water is the Birem River which takes its source from the Atewa Range. Into the Birem itself, flow numerous small rivers and streams. The state enjoys a good amount of rainfall and possesses some of the best agricultural lands in Ghana. In the pre-colonial era, the vast stretches of land were exploited mainly for hunting, subsistence agriculture and gold mining. Birem Valley in Akyem Abuakwa was well known for its richness in gold. (Addo-Fening, 1976; Afriffah, 2000).

The name Akyem Abuakwa appears severally in the European records on gold mining activities in Ghana, for indeed it was a principal source of gold for the trans-Atlantic trade that took place before the country was colonised by the British. The British merchant Bosman pointed out that Akyem ‘furnishes us with large quantities of gold as any land I know ...’ (Addo-Fening, 1988; Ward, 1966). The evidence that Akyem was an important supplier of gold is further corroborated by A Dutch report of 1716 which described Akyem as “... the fountain from which the trade in gold must flow into these countries and

this being stopped all the leeward factories must necessarily suffer on that account...” (Addo-Fening 1988)

In addition to the fact that Akyem Abuakwa was the sole supplier of gold, the deep distinguishing colour of the gold made it the purest and most valuable of all the gold exported from the Gold Coast (Macdonald, 1902; Bosman, 1967; Barbot, 1732; Addo-Fening, 1976). The map of the Gold Coast drawn by Anville in 1729 refers to Akyem Abuakwa as very large and rich in gold (Daaku, 1969; Afriffah, 2000; Fynn, 1971). R. F. Rømer; the Danish trader and writer, noted in the nineteenth century that Akyem Abuakwa traders sent only a few slaves but plenty of gold to the Coast (Perbi, 2004; Addo-Fening, 1997). On top of its vast reserves of gold, the land of Akyem Abuakwa is also blessed with considerable diamond resources. (Junner, 1958; Kwakye, 2007).

### **Mining related conflicts in Pre-colonial Ghana**

The causes of conflicts within the traditional Ghanaian society were varied and numerous in nature and included among others; chieftaincy disputes, access to direct trade on the coast, inter-state or tribal clashes resulting from ambitious expansionist schemes etc. Generally, the root cause of inter-ethnic conflicts that occur in Northern Ghana as a result of disputes over succession to a chieftaincy title or office have been traced to the attempt by the colonial administration to categorise societies in that part of the country into acephalous (non-centralised) and centralised groups (Ladoucer, 1979; Hippolyt, 2003; Bombande, 2007; Brukum, 2007). However, one aspect of life that has proven to be a hornet's nest in inter-ethnic relations in Ghana since pre-colonial times to the present is the economic activity of mining.

Historically, the control over gold supplies or resources played a part in military expansion and the transformation of kingdoms into empires during the pre-colonial era. Many of the internecine wars throughout the forest region of Ghana before the arrival of Europeans were, in part deeply rooted in the quest by the Akan states to not just extend their influence and territorial boundaries but even more importantly, conquer auriferous lands (Macdonald, 1902) Militarily weaker states, almost always at the mercy of the stronger, powerful, and more organised states, were either forced to flee from their agricultural or mineral-rich lands or forcibly annexed and incorporated into various kingdoms. Gold impregnated areas or territories were exposed to the jealousy and malevolence of other states (Buah, 1980).

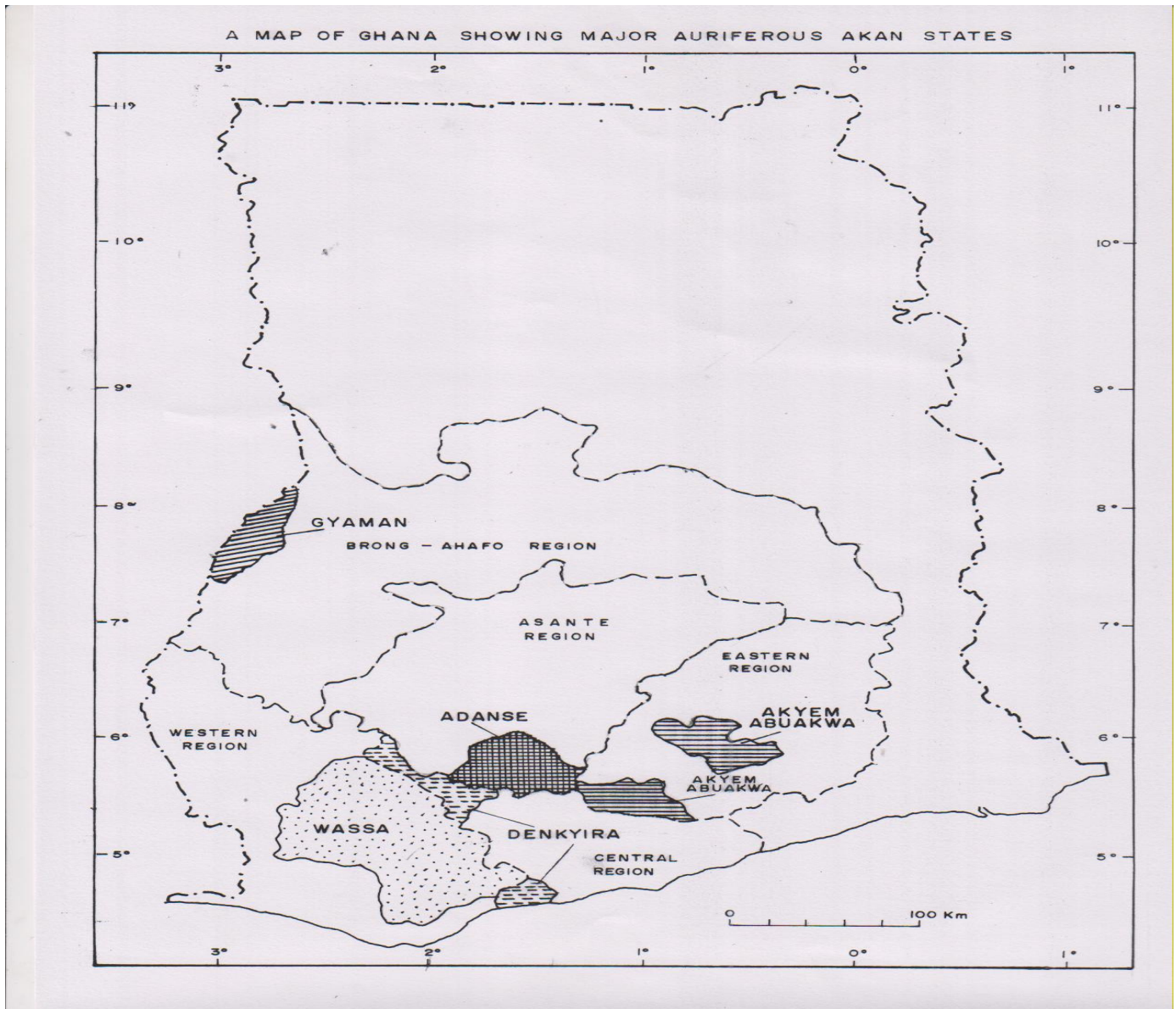


Fig. 1: A map of Ghana showing the major auriferous traditional states.

Many ethnic communities which existed mainly as tribes or kingdoms in Ghana used gold not only as a medium of exchange to trade in various goods and services but also as an embodiment of power, wealth and influence of various tribal groups or states (Nyame et. al, 2009). Denkyira territorial power until the eighteenth century is traceable to the fact that its earlier military probes were to the north, to control the trade and mines of the Bono-Takyiman region. Adanse which derived its wealth and prosperity from the abundant gold which the area possessed was absorbed by Denkyira, her immediate neighbour across the Ofin. At about this time, Obuasi, centre of one of the richest concentrations of reef gold in all West Africa, came under the direct political control of the Denkyirahene (Ofosu-Mensah, 2010). This was followed by more powerful military probes to the coast. Before 1690, Denkyira conquered Sefwi and Aowin to the

west and Wassa and Assin-Twifo to the south. Akyem became an ally. Each of these conquered or client states possessed valuable auriferous lands, and by demanding heavy tributes in gold as well as slaves, the Denkyirahene strengthened his treasury and secured the firearms needed for his powerful military machine. By the end of the seventeenth century, Denkyira controlled most of the important trade routes between Asante and the south-western and central states of the Gold Coast (Buah, 1980).

Denkyira became a vast, powerful empire not only because of the many vassal states it annexed through wars of expansion, but also because of the wealth it obtained from the gold mines in the empire, revenue from trade and receipts from tributes, taxes and tolls. In addition to the very rich deposits of gold in metropolitan

Denkyira itself, nearly all the important tributary states, including Adanse, Asante, Aowin, Twifo and Wassa were highly endowed with huge reserves of gold. The numerous vassal states also paid tribute in the form of slaves and gold to the Denkyira King (Buah, 1980)

Endowed with so many advantages, Denkyira's power increased tremendously. However, as often happens in history when a kingdom or an empire becomes wealthy and powerful, the rulers became tyrannical, and this with other causes led to the decline and fall of the empire, following the decisive defeat at Feyiase in 1701 at the hands of the Asante, her tributary state. The long-term cause of this was the longstanding desire of the Asante not only to free themselves from Denkyira's repressive rule but also the promise of securing a direct access to the coastal trade with the European merchants upon independence served as a great incentive. After this defeat, Adanse and Denkyira came under the suzerainty of Asante.

Gold is a natural target in times of war, and over the centuries royal treasuries have been ransacked many times. In 1723, Asante in a relentless rivalry with the Bono Kingdom succeeded in establishing her hegemony over the latter. The conquered land was integrated into the Asante Empire which was headed at that time by Opoku Ware I. The military campaigns by Asante armies under Opoku Ware I into the Bono Kingdom was motivated by the Asantehene's compelling desire to gain control of the gold resources of the Bono Kingdom. Kumasi was indeed a poor place at that time compared with Bono Manso (the capital of the Bono kingdom) after the conquest; their goldsmiths taught the Asante how to decorate the state emblems with gold and how to make gold jewellery for the kings and chiefs and gold and silver jewellery for the queen mother and royal women in Asante. Their Chief who was once in charge of the great market at Mansu, organised the market of Kumasi for trade and introduced the standard gold weight from Bono. According to Wilks, (1972), Meyerowitz, (1952) and Garrard, (1980), the confiscation after conquest of the entire Bono Takyiman royal treasury "revolutionalised" the Asante financial system.

Similarly, when the Asante king suffered a disastrous defeat at the battle of Katamanso in 1826, to take but one example, he lost not only his wives and daughters but also according to Reindorf's account "all his royal badges, state umbrellas, gold-hilted swords, jewels and the military chest containing thousands of gold cartouches filled with gold dust instead of gunpowder..." (Garrard, 1989). In 1874 and again in 1876, British military expeditions entered Kumasi, where they seized hundreds of items of Asante gold work. The British also compelled the Asantehene to pay a crushing war indemnity, the first instalment of which was handed over at Fomena in Adanse on 13th February, 1874. (Boahen, 1975) Among

these items according Bonnat, were "two massive gold birds which surmounted the royal throne. (Garrard, 1989).

For the greater part of the period 1740–1818, direct Asante intervention in Gyaman affairs was intermittent, but after the major revolt of the Gyamanhene Adinkra Kosopre in 1818, the Asantehene imposed stricter controls over Gyaman in order to maintain his hegemony. As a consequence, a direct representative of the Kumasi government was made jointly responsible with the Gyamanhene for the governance of all Gyaman and an annual tribute in gold flowed into the Asante treasury. The state "Surplus" of Gyaman was drained off as tribute paid to the state apparatus of the Asante Empire. The tribute paid by Gyaman was one of the major sources of the gold wealth of Asante. The Asante nation's quest for gold influenced them to conquer vast kingdoms like Denkyira, Gyaman and Bono Takyiman in order to control their gold resources. (Boahen, 1975; Buah, 1980; Meyerowitz, 1952)

In 1785, a successful Asante assault on the isolated Wassa states led to full-scale conquest and occupation of the former state. Wassa was at last forced to pay tributes to the greater Asante Empire. (Wilks, 1975) and it is probable that more of the gold revenues of Wassa were siphoned off as tribute to Kumasi than collected previously by the kings of Wassa.

Another factor that brought about conflict in Ghana during the pre-colonial days was the development of the Atlantic trade that led to the emergence of the Asante Empire. This trade began with the arrival of the Portuguese on the coast of Ghana from the 1470s onwards, followed by the French, the English, the Dutch and later the Danes, and the erection of their forts and castles that still dot the coastline of Ghana. With the arrival of these Europeans, the trade in gold, ivory and then slaves which had hitherto been mainly with the Northern regions of Africa and the Mediterranean through the trans-Saharan trade routes began to be diverted southwards and across the Atlantic to Europe and the Americas. (Boahen, 1975)

### **Contribution of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to Conflicts in Ghana**

The development of the Atlantic trade resulted into conflicts in Ghana in two main ways. Firstly, though the Asante people were the principal producers of the most important of these trade commodities, namely gold, they could not sell these commodities directly to the Europeans in their castles but had to sell them through the coastal peoples such as the Nzema, the Ahanta, the Wassa, the Twifu, the Fante and the Ga. These middlemen did not hesitate to cheat the traders coming from the inlands. It therefore naturally became the desire of the Asante to gain access to the coast so that they could sell their products directly to the Europeans and acquire the imported goods, especially arms that they

needed more cheaply and more easily. In this way, the Atlantic trade provided them with an incentive or a motive to embark on an imperial drive towards the coast which resulted in frequent battles between the Asante and the above named states in general and the Fante in particular. (Ward, 1966; Rodney, 1969; Buah, 1980; Boahen, 1975).

Secondly, among the goods imported into the country in ever increasing quantities from the seventeenth century onwards were guns and gunpowder, and the Asante were able to build up a large stock of these, mainly because they were the principal producers of gold dust which was the commodity in hottest demand on the coast at the time. Motivated by a desire to drive towards the coast to trade more directly with the Europeans and aided by the availability of guns and ammunition, the Asante were able to extend their frontiers widely. The guns and gunpowder obtained by the Asante revolutionised warfare in the country and made life turbulent and unsettled. It is therefore not surprising that the Asante were able to conquer and annex most of the pre-colonial states and kingdoms of the country and established an empire for themselves which stretched as far as the eastern parts of the Ivory Coast. (Boahen, 1975)

Taking cognisance of the above developments, it can be said that, over centuries, gold was a symbol of power and wealth and gold mining provided one of the most important motivations for state formation in Akanland. No one who aspired to any status or influence in Akan society could go far without gold; and most men would do anything they could to get their hands on it.

Gold ornaments, nuggets and gold dust used in burials were in theory sacrosanct, and it was regarded as a heinous offence to dig them up and re-use them without some compelling reason. Despite this, Akan burial sites were frequently violated for their gold. In times of war, an invading army would dig up the burial places of its opponents in search of gold. In 1718, the graves of the

Asante were looted for gold by an invading army from Aowin. In 1807, when the Asante entered Anomabu during their invasion of the Fante coast, "all the floors of the house of respectable people, in which it is custom to bury the dead were dug up in search of treasure." (Garrard, 1989)

### **Unscrupulous Traditional Regimes and their contribution to Conflicts**

In pre-colonial days, the dividing lines between taxation, extortion and outright plunder were sometimes very thin. Evidence from some of the smaller and decentralised polities of the Akan region shows that petty chiefs and their functionaries could enter a mining district any time they chose and in total defiance of the abusa share and

tribute systems; forcibly confiscate all gold dust and gold jewellery held by miners and their families. (Dumett, 1987). The evidence shows that a similar deterioration of traditional standards afflicted Wassa Fiase in the 1870s. It was said that King Enemil Kwao abused the abusa share tradition in several ways: first, he raised the royal share of mining profits in certain districts from one-third to one-half; second, he sometimes would send his own corps of state miners into the mining properties of a sub-chief, intimidate and push out the local residents who were mining and mine for gold directly without paying any share or rent to the local authority. Such practices aggravated old hostilities between kings and chiefs in Wassa and led to the tendency towards disunity and instability. This was at least partly responsible for the depopulation of certain mining districts owing to the attempt of the people to avoid the King's agents by flight to the coastal towns or top adjacent interior states. An eyewitness' account states that "the villages are subjected to incessant plunder, under the name of taxation by their kings who descend with their warriors as often as convenient upon these gold diggers, and carry off every particle of the precious metal that has not been buried". Thus, even in smaller decentralised polities where the formalities of regular taxation might be ignored, evidence shows that petty chiefs and their functionaries could enter a mining area at any time they chose and forcibly confiscate all gold held by miners and their families. (Dumett, 1987; Boyle, 1874).

### **Mining related conflicts during the colonial era in Ghana**

It could also be recalled that during the seventeenth century, one Ofori Panin, led a group of malcontent migrants from Adanse after a civil war and settled in the area to the north of the Birem River in what is now Akyem Abuakwa. At the time of their arrival, most of modern Akyem Abuakwa was part of the Akwamu Empire with its capital at Nyanoase. Asamankese was then an important town whose Stool was next in rank to that of the King of Akwamu. (Affrifa, 2000; Kwamena-Poh, 1973; Ako-Brew, 1981; Addo-Fening, 1975).

The Akyem in their period of migration from Adanse to Bansa and their subsequent dispersal to areas between the Pra and Birem valleys came into possession of a region which was both auriferous and diamondiferous. This exposed them to the jealousy and malevolence of neighbouring states, especially Akwamu. Finding the fortress very difficult to subdue by force of arms, the Akwamu resorted to harsher economic policies which made them monopolise the gold trade on the coast at the expense of the Akyem producers. Akyem-Abuakwa reacted to the monopolistic tendencies by taking up arms. This resulted in numerous wars between the two states which eventually culminated in the decisive defeat of Akwamu in 1730. With the conquest and absorption of Akwamu territories, Abuakwa grew in size and proportion

to encompass areas extending from the Pompom river and Bewaase in the east to the neighbourhood of the Pra in the west and from the Kwahu boundary (around Gyegyeti) in the north to the Densu river at Nsawam in the south. (ERG 1/7/37 PRAAD, Koforidua). This victory and subsequent integration of this land witnessed the proliferation of Akyem settlements all over the vanquished area through massive migration from Adanse to Bansa area into the lands evacuated by the conquered Akwamus. For the next two hundred years, the Asamankese Stool was represented on the Okyeman Council. During this period, it participated in the Council's deliberations and accepted its jurisdiction without any protest.

Towards the end of 1920 however, a change occurred in the attitude of Chief Kwaku Amoah of Asamankese and Odikro Kwame Kuma of Akwatia towards the Paramount Stool of Akyem Abuakwa and in June 1921, the two chiefs began openly to contemplate secession from Abuakwa. The discovery of diamond in Asamankese intensified the litigation between the paramount power of Akyem Abuakwa and Barima Kwaku Amoah. One of the first acts of Nana Ofori Atta I when he became Paramount Chief was to pass a new bye-law in connection with the alienation of Akyem Abuakwa lands. The said bye-law imposed certain obligations on prospective buyers of land in Akyem Abuakwa. The sale of land was made subject to the consent of the Omanhene and reserved mining and timber rights to the Stools concerned. The reforms were intended to remove the blots in Akyem Abuakwa's land tenure system and re-affirm the traditional values of patriotism, collective responsibility and equity. (Adm 11/1630 Case No. 07, PRAAD, Accra)

Ofori Atta's claim to joint ownership meant that before any concession could be granted in Asamankese, he had to be consulted and being the Paramount Chief, will dictate any transaction on behalf of the Asamankese Stool lands. In effect, he could collect a considerable amount of money from any prospective concession bidder and give a paltry sum to the Asamankese Stool. This was what Kwaku Amoah saw and objected. Kwaku Amoah wanted to take all if not the lion's share of the diamond concession money that will be granted to any prospective bidder. Barima Kwaku Amoah objected to Ofori Atta's land reforms on the grounds that by custom, land in Akyem Abuakwa as elsewhere in the Akan world, came to be regarded as "owned" in the first instance by the sub-Stool to which they were directly attached and not indirectly by the Paramount Stool; in certain instances, portions of tribal lands attached to the individual Stools were conquered on the initiative of the sub-Stools themselves at the expense of their resources. (Adm 11/1627 PRAAD, Accra)

Alliance to the Paramount Stool did not only involve liability to a call to military service, it also involved

considerable, often recurrent expenditure for the sub-Chiefs and their subjects. In the event of litigation involving lands attached to sub-Stools, it was the responsibility of the sub-chiefs rather than the Paramount Chief to find the money to finance the lawsuits. Sometimes, this meant pledging the sub-Stools as security for loans, thereby binding "the whole of the village or townspeople to pay the money raised on the pledge as well as the interest charged on the loan.

Finally, the religious ceremonies performed in propitiating of the gods and ancestors and for the assurance of the well-being of the land and its users were partly a responsibility of the sub-stools. Hence, in spite of Okyenhene Amoako Atta I's claim that all lands in the state belonged to him, Asamankesehene Kwaku Amoah considered himself as "the true heir and owner" rather than a "caretaker of Asamankese Stool lands".

The litigation became protracted due to the economic interest the congress lawyers had in the case. It could be recalled that Nana Ofori Atta I's close association with the colonial regime made him the most mistrusted, most harassed, and most maligned Chief in the Gold Coast during the 1920s and 1930s. He became the whipping-boy as a collaborator and stooge of the colonial administration. (Addo-Fening, 1975)

In 1920, Ofori Atta and other conservative nationalists of the Legislative Council succeeded in prevailing upon the colonial government to deny the National Congress of British West Africa's (NCBWA) delegation sent to London to present a petition that needed audience. This made the nationalists mount a campaign of vilification to embarrass and discredit him when they returned from London. It was this growing popular antipathy towards Ofori Atta that caused the Asamankese dispute, a local quarrel between him and two of his sub-chiefs to assume considerable importance in the national politics of the 1920s and 1930s. The Nationalists looked for an opportunity to undermine Nana Ofori Atta's position in Gold Coast politics and the Asamankese dispute provided them with a useful weapon to fight him. (Edsman, 1979)

Another factor that prolonged the dispute was that Asamankese did not have financial problems of hiring lawyers due to the unlimited funds accrued from the diamond concessions they sold. The Congress lawyers like Kobina Sakyi; Hutton Mills and Kojo Thompson reaped a considerable amount of money from the litigation. The total royalties that were paid to the Asamankese and Akwatia Stools from 1923 and 1943 was about £60,000 all of which was virtually committed to the litigation. (Holmes, 1972). Thus, the prolonged nature of the Asamankese dispute was a deliberate effort by the lawyers to weaken the state of Akyem Abuakwa financially and embarrass the Okyenhene politically. This meant that, dissenting chiefs, like Barima Kwaku Amoah

and oppositional commoners could count on external allies in time of crisis. (Adm 11/1622 PRAAD, Accra; Simensen, 1975).

The nostalgic claim of Asamankese Stool lands by Akwamuhene compounded the litigation. The Akwamuhene capitalised on the internal wrangling between the Okyenhene and Barima Kwaku Amoah and claimed that Asamankese Stool Lands and the people thereon were the bona fide property of the Akwamu Stool. It could be recalled that before Akyem Abuakwa superimposed her political sway on Akwamu and reduced the empire to a district status behind the Volta River, the Asamankese Stool was next in rank to the Akwamu Stool. It is of interest to note that Asamankese and the entire Akwamu people belonged to the Agona clan and since they were the "same people", they saw the Akyem Abuakwa Stool which belonged to the Asona clan as a usurper to the Akwamu Stool. According to the Akwamuhene, Ofori Atta was a stranger who should not be allowed to exercise his lordship over the Asamankese people.

The migrant communities in Akyem Abuakwa who were greatly affected by Ofori Atta's land reforms sympathised with Barima Kwaku Amoah at the heat of the litigation. These migrant communities were the Dwabeng, the Krobo, the Ga and the Akuapem. Some of the Akyem Abuakwa sub-chiefs and elders who were benefitting from the reckless sales of Akyem Abuakwa lands to these migrant farmers also saw their interest at stake and crassly supported Kwaku Amoah. (Addo-Fening, 1975)

With tact, diplomacy and wisdom, Nana Ofori Atta was able to bring Asamankese and Akwatia secession disputes under his control by the enactment of the Native Administrative Ordinance (NAO) of 1927 which re-asserted the Okyenhene's right and authority in the dispensation of Stool Lands. The Native Administrative Ordinance of 1927 strengthened the position of the paramount and divisional chiefs at the local level by recognising the state Council of Chiefs, defining procedural rules in destoolment cases and giving the chiefs power to suppress subversive political activities within their states. The Asamankese dispute which intensified with the discovery of diamond was one of the most unhappy episodes and the most intractable and traumatic problems in the history of Akyem Abuakwa. Whiles Simensen (1975) argues that the "essence of the dispute was the control of diamond money", Edsman (1979) holds the view that after 1927, the crisis was "in essence an ARPS campaign against the NAO, Ofori Atta, and the constitution which excluded the educated elites. Holmes (1972) on his part blames Kobina Sekyi and the lawyers who intentionally prolonged the case for their benefits. Addo-Fening (1975), who perhaps has worked on Akyem history more than any living historian traces the historical origins of the dispute and suggests that, the cause was "a wrangle between Nana Ofori Atta and the

two chiefs over matters of title and interest in the Asamankese and Akwatia lands." Ashan Li (1993) a Chinese historian views it as a protest of the "small against the big" Dumehasie (1997) on his part viewed the conflict from an economic perspective and identified the multi-faceted western economic forces that combined to trigger off the conflict.

Finally, it is worthy of note that in the penultimate years before Ghana attained independence from Britain, a very significant constitutional crisis arose which is deeply rooted in the management of resources (especially gold resources) for development. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the nation's first post-independence leader and his Convention Peoples Party (CPP) government pursued a unitary form of government which was met with very stiff opposition. Soon after the elections of 1954, a new party, the National Liberation Movement (NLM) which was made up primarily of some disgruntled Asante members of the CPP was launched. (Boahen, 1975). The main brain behind the formation of this new party was the then Asantehene's linguist Baffour Akoto. The party was bolstered when the eminent Ghanaian scholar and politician Dr. J.B. Danquah joined its ranks to serve as leader. The NLM resisted the Centralisation policies of Dr. Nkrumah whilst supporting a role for traditional rulers. The party therefore advocated a federal form of government with increased powers for the various regions.

A critical examination of these demands reveals that these concerns were deeply rooted in the economic activity of gold mining. The Asante territory is highly endowed with huge deposits of gold, especially most of

the gold exports from Ghana comes from the Obuasi area, hence the Asante people were genuinely worried that since they had majority of economic resources that was to fuel the economy of the new country, their interests or development would be better secured under a system of government that could guarantee them a greater degree of autonomy in order that they could enjoy the benefits of their land.

These demands were however, largely rejected by the CPP government who invited a British constitutional adviser to ascertain the viability of operating the federal system of government in Ghana. The British constitutional expert backed the CPP position and fresh elections were held in 1956 that ultimately led to the independence of Ghana.

The NLM were enraged at how their demands were quashed by the government and sensing conspiracy, they advanced plans to secede from the country leading to the popular slogan, "M'ate me ho" which means "I have separated" by the NLM supporters. (Asante and Gyimah-



Boadi, 2004). These secessionist threats were decisively repressed by the government and this culminated into a campaign of violence against members of the CPP to the extent that, even the Prime Minister Dr. Nkrumah was not spared when he was forbidden to enter Kumasi (the Asante and opposition capital). In fact, the events leading to the proclamation of independence was marked by tensions and acrimony between the opposition NLM and the CPP government and finally erupted into violence in Kumasi. This violence started with the cold-blooded murder of E.Y. Baffo, the chief propaganda secretary of the NLM by Twumasi-Ankrah, the regional propaganda secretary of the CPP on 9 October 1955. Though Twumasi-Ankrah was arrested, tried and hanged, the NLM was not pacified. Tension became so severe that for two years no CPP minister could enter Kumasi; hundreds of CPP members fled from Kumasi to Accra. (Boahen, 1975). This example therefore clearly establishes the point that gold mining as an economic activity has historically been a cause of conflict in Ghana. Indeed, an archetype of this situation was the case in the history of Biafran War in Nigeria in the late 1960s where an ethnic group wanting to secede from the country in order to unilaterally exploit mining resources located in its regional area, oil in this case led to a nationwide strife. (Azam, 2001).

Mining operations in post-colonial Ghana over the years have generated profound social conflicts arising from mainly land use conflicts, unfair compensation schemes for displaced communities, distribution of mining rent, conflicts between large and small scale miners, among others. These conflicts, in many cases, have resulted in violent confrontations. (Third World Network Africa, 2001) The next section of the paper will expose how the unbridled pursuance of mineral wealth through especially, gold mining has contributed to setting off social conflict in the West African country.

### **Post-colonial Conflicts in Ghana arising from mining**

Modern scientific mining, despite the ambivalent nature of its contribution to the economy of Ghana has also played its part in the sporadic skirmishes that continues to plague the West African country's poor peoples. The rather furtive activities of galamsey which is an offshoot of modern mining brings in its wake, economic, environmental, human, health and social problems to the society and the country as a whole and sadly, these problems sometimes degenerate into conflicts between the host mining communities on the one hand and the multinational mining firms and illegal galamsey operators on the other. This section of the paper brings to light some of the teething problems and that often trigger off confrontations between host mining communities and their guest mineral extracting companies in Ghana.

### **Small-scale Artisanal Miners (galamsey) versus Large-scale Concessionary Mining Firms**

Conflicts amongst community or family members over land ownership is a major problem in many traditional societies in Ghana where land is the major form of asset for livelihoods of many rural, predominantly poor people (Quissumbing *et al.*, 2001a) Onset of ASM activity in a given area was, therefore expected to exacerbate the problem. Firstly, the problematic nature of the Concessions regime in the country's mining industry has encouraged conflicts between the natives of the mining areas and the mining companies or galamsey practitioners. The procurement of concessions confers on the expatriate mining companies' immense entitlements, rights, powers and controls much to the detriment of the communities that host them. Once a company obtained a concession, all occupiers of land within the frontiers of the lease, held tenancies at their will; and nobody could undertake any economic activity on the lease without the sanction of the mining company. (Addo-Fening, 1997) Section 24 of the Concessions Ordinance (1900) outlawed any person from searching for minerals without a prospecting license, while Section 34 (1) limited potential African mining entrepreneurs to the use of local technology. (Addo-Fening, 1997) this attempted to prevent the indigenous people or the local miners from the mining industry which had been their main occupation up to the 1880s, and turned it into the exclusive preserve of European capitalists.

Meanwhile, the Concessions Ordinance paid no attention to the fact that a majority of rural peoples on whose lands these concessions are given; are either subsistence farmers or small-scale miners. Conflicts usually occur in these communities when the extraction of minerals is not handled in a sustainable, eco-friendly manner leading to a consequent loss of livelihood, extensive damage to the environment and an inequitable distribution of benefits (WECD, 1987; MMSD, 2002b).

This situation deprived the locals of vast fertile lands for agriculture which was and indeed, still is their main source of livelihood. It must be noted that most of these concession lands are to be found in the densely forested and therefore highly fertile areas of the communities that upon their purchase, the people are rendered virtually redundant because their only source of agriculture in most cases are robbed from them. There have therefore been recorded cases where the grievances of these host communities have resulted in bloody confrontations between themselves and the companies. For instance in June 2005, more than 500 people from Prestea, Himan, Bondaye and other communities surrounding Bogoso poured on to the streets of Prestea to demonstrate against surface mining by the Bogoso Gold Limited (BGL). Some of the demonstrators attempted to enter a nearby pit that security officers were guarding. The security men fired warning shots and tear gas, wounding

seven of the demonstrators. The matter is still under investigation and at the time, the community gave the mining company a 21-day ultimatum to stop all mining activities at Prestea. (Agbesinyale, 2003).

At this point it would be necessary to state that the nature of mining activities in the country during the post-colonial period was not and has still not differed any much from the regime under the colonial period in the sense that the large mechanised mining companies were owned by expatriate multinationals and Africans as of old were relegated to the fringes and only participated as unskilled labourers in the pay of the companies. Nonetheless, some daring Africans who acquired mining skills from their elders managed to gain employment with the western mining firms where they again learned some scientific methods of extracting minerals like gold, through the use of chemicals like mercury and cyanide. In the course of time when the companies laid them off, these people combined traditional mining techniques with modern ones to extract minerals. The new amalgamated system that combined these two technologies is locally referred to as galamsey (artisanal small scale mining) which is similar to the practice of garimpeiros in Brazil. (Agbesinyale, 2003) These galamsey operations are usually referred to in academic circles as "Artisanal Small-Scale Miners" or ASM.

It is a general truth that, before large-scale mechanised mines acquired concessions, indigenous artisanal and small-scale miners would have already been working on the land. These people who obtain their livelihood through their small-scale mining operations are the uncelebrated trailblazers to many, if not most of the gold deposits, applying the use of local techniques and procedures to identify profitable economic mineral reserves. Hence, the local miners are left with the sore feeling of injustice and anger when they are ejected from their gold fields only for the same land to be leased to foreign mining firms that have the capacity to embark on mechanised exploitation of minerals. In numerous cases, some aggrieved galamsey miners disregard the warnings of trespass and proceed to mine on the concessions and leading to conflicts.

Moreover, with limited personnel strength in the country's police force, these mining companies were left to devise their own means of ensuring the security of their property. These "private" security personnel are mostly poorly trained and therefore very unprofessional in their attitudes and approach to work and sometimes their rush and unethical response to emergencies causes rather simple situations to degenerate into complex conflicts. This state of affairs coupled with foul and disheartening rhetoric by the expatriate concessionaires go a long way to create tensions and confrontations in the affected host communities. The analysis above therefore validates the observation of Hilson, (2004) when he posited that poor communication has been an important initiator of

conflicts. Thus, in an attempt to curb the rampant purloin of ores from its concession, Anglo-Ashanti was reported to have threatened to shoot on sight any artisanal/small-scale miner who entered the company's concession. In June 2005, one ASM operator died after receiving injuries on Anglo-Ashanti's concession. There are conflicting reports as to how he died: the family of the deceased and the medical officer who carried out the autopsy on the dead man allege that he died of gunshot wounds, but the mine security officers indicated that he was wounded when spikes on top of a metal gate pierced his stomach. Investigations into this incident are still ongoing (Akabzaa et. al., 2007).

### **Galamsey Miners versus State and Private Mine Security**

Again, due to the criminalisation of their activities, galamsey miners, who cause a lot of ecological pollution; especially to the water bodies, through the use of harmful chemicals such as mercury and cyanide to extract the precious metal from the earth prove to be a burden on the government which must act in order to enjoy good political will of the people. The central government therefore as a measure of curbing the illegal activities of galamsey on occasion and usually upon intelligence, unleashes the military on the illegal small-scale miners. These soldiers inflict serious damages on the miners and therefore towns noted for galamsey in Ghana are usually perilous places to stay for young men as the arrival of troops engenders a lot of fuss and commotion and the young men have to run for cover because sometimes the excesses of such military operations, popularly known as 'scatter', means that innocent people are brutalised. During the military regime of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government of the 1980s, it was common to witness police raids on galamsey operators in the Wassa West mining district, which occasionally led to the arrest and prosecution of culprits. (Aubyn, 2006). A further case in point is the major confrontation that occurred in July 1996 between when a group of small-scale artisanal miners (galamsey) operating on the Ashanti Goldfield (AGC) mining lease area and regiments of the national armed forces at Obuasi. After the end of hostilities, it was reported that an estimated US\$ 10 million in mining equipment were wrecked. Yet another clash occurred in July the same year (1996) between artisanal miners and a group of policemen on the concession of Barnex in Prestea, some 45 km from Damang in the Western region of the country. (Aubyn, 2006)

At times too, well-meaning citizens of the host communities, occasionally formed watchdogs committees to resist the galamsey operators and this has led to numerous violent confrontations between local youth 'watchdogs' and the galamsey miners resulting in several casualties on both sides.

According to a research carried out by the Third World Network Africa, it was observed that in many mining communities in Ghana, there was a strong mistrust of government agencies, especially the Police and the district and regional security councils. These are perceived as agents of the mining companies. This belief stems from the fact that these security agencies through their frequent raids on the small-scale miners perpetrate atrocious crimes against innocent citizens of these communities. (Third World Network Africa, 2001)

### **Host Mining Communities versus Miners in general (Small and Large scale, Legal and Illegal)**

Furthermore, another area that generates social tension in post-colonial Ghana as a result of mining activities is the ever growing awareness among the population of the impacts of mining in the host communities. As more and more people are educated, they become better informed about their environment and these people then

consciously take steps to tackle the issue of their very sustenance. The proliferation of various organised social movements and pressure groups against mining in Ghana is not entirely surprising. For instance, the exclusion of people who do not possess landed property such as farms, houses etc. from compensation considerations is a major source of social tension. The majority of these who are women are usually ignored and invariably drift back to the concession to carry out illegal farming amidst persecution from the mining companies. (Third World Network Africa, 2001)

On 15th December 2010, the Daily Guide an Accra based Newspaper reported that a group of irate High School students from the Abuakwa State College had taken to the streets of the Kyebi, the capital of Akyem Abuakwa to demonstrate against the death of their colleague who lost his life after falling into one of the uncovered galamsey pits, the report went on to say that, the death of the student whose name was given as Jamal brings to five the number of people who had fallen into the pits. The students therefore vented their spleen on a nearby shop owner whose goods were vandalised. (ghananation.com, 2010)



Fig. 2: Students of the Abuakwa State College (ABUSCO) at Kyebi in the East Akim municipality of the Eastern Region of Ghana, protesting through the principal streets of Abuakwa after Abubakar Yussif Jamal, a 17-year-old first year student the school died when he fell into a large galamsey pit outside the school's premises. Some petty traders had their shops vandalized in the course of the demonstrations." (www.ghananation.com; Google images).

It is however worthy of note that, in view of the pervasiveness of mining related conflicts, the various mining companies operating in Ghana have both in the past and present resorted to a variety of measures to better enhance relations with small-scale miners in the impact communities. However, many of these measures and mechanisms adopted by the big mines to broker peaceful negotiations with the small-scale local artisanal miners and the inhabitants of the contiguous communities have woefully failed, and subsequently led to antagonistic relationships in places such as Bogoso, Prestea and Obuasi which hosts the BGL and Anglo-Ashanti Gold operations, respectively. (Amankwaah and Sackey, 2006:)

### **The Contribution of WACAM**

To partly reduce conflict relating to land use in the mining sector, the government, large scale mining companies and NGO's have initiated various alternative livelihood programmes for people in mining communities. The government has in particular, also attempted a policy of relocating artisanal miners to designated and demarcated plots of land solely for ASM operations with the primary aim of better control, monitoring, legalisation and registration of illegal miners. Field evidence so far, however, suggests that these initiatives may not succeed due to stiff resistance by miners and other interest groups. Communities, local land owners and artisanal miners, being firmly on the ground, are more likely to perpetuate customary (illegal mining activities to the detriment of formalisation. (Nyame and Blocher, 2009). Hilson and Potter (2003) conclude that, despite having passed a series of industry-specific laws and regulations, and implementing an array of support services under the guidance of Gesellshcaft Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and the World Bank, the Ghanaian government is widely regarded as having failed in its attempts to regulate the sector and bring it into the public domain.

However, the operations of WACAM need to be singled out for particular praise in this direction. This non-governmental organisation in the Western Region of Ghana, was formed in the year 1998 and its primary focus includes inter alia to aid communities that are adversely affected by gold mining in mobilising around their concerns. According to the brief background found on the website of the NGO, the organisation was set up in response to the resultant bad consequences such as the numerous forced evictions, inadequate land compensation, land degradation, the destruction of culturally sacred sites, community displacement and the pollution of integral water bodies arising from the PNDC government's adoption of the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) in 1983 which led to a fast and harsh liberalisation of the mining sector that was previously state-led.

WACAM therefore seeks to ensure that the rights of mining communities are respected, to aid communities whose lands have been usurped by mining companies in obtaining adequate compensation packages, to liaise with the Ghanaian Government and other stakeholder organisations on issues concerning the effects of mining in the country etc.

In achieving their mandate, WACAM uses a diversity of approaches. For instance, the organisation represents mining communities in their negotiations with mineral companies, conduct research and documentation of the various human rights abuses in the mining communities among others. This small organisation, despite the odds, is contributing its widow's mite to the alleviation of suffering in the affected mining communities. By so doing, WACAM has also contributed in reducing mining related conflicts in the country. This has accounted for the numerous awards and recognitions bestowed upon the NGO by both local and international agencies, for instance, WACAM, received the "Outstanding Grant Partner Award" of the Rights and Voice Initiative (RAVI) funded by The United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). WACAM received the award for efficiently implementing the RAVI Project, which involved the strengthening of the capacity of communities affected by mining using rights-based approach at the 2009 RAVI Annual Learn and Share Festival. (wacamghana.com, 2011)

### **Conclusion**

After independence from Britain in 1957, the three northern regions of modern-day Ghana have proven beyond all reasonable doubts that it is a highly volatile part of the country through the myriad of violent clashes between different ethnic groups such as the Konkomba-Nanumba war, the Konkomba-Dagomba war, the Mamprusi-Kusasi war, the Konkomba-Bimoba war, Nawuri-Gonja war etc. and also through the many battles that have been and continues to be fought by the members of the same family over chieftaincy rights such as the conflicts between the Andani and Abudu gates of the Northern region that culminated in the decapitation of the head of the then overlord of Dagbon, the Ya-Na Yakubu Andani in the year 2002.

However commendable this achievement may be, this paper has revealed that the mineral-rich south has not always been peaceful throughout history and that throughout the history of mining in the country, there have been many wars, conflicts and disputes that have emanated from this economic activity. In the period before the advent of the Europeans on Ghanaian soil, there were wars of expansion deeply rooted in the quest for the control of gold resources in the auriferous territories of the Akan forest. The Asante Empire in this way can be cited as a typical example of a conqueror state extraordinaire. Then in the colonial and post-

colonial epochs in the West African nation's history, the siphoning of the mineral resources by giant western expatriate mining combines to the metropolitan Europe at the expense of its African owners have led to numerous mining conflicts in the country.

In conclusion, this paper calls on all the major stake holders in the Ghanaian mining industry to work together in order to sanitise the system. Local host mining communities must be given their due share of development from the profits of the mining enterprise. After all, it is their land which is taken away from them to make way for mining operations. Again, the operations of local small-scale artisanal or galamsey miners must also be streamlined to conform to the existing regulations, in this way; the state security agencies should also reduce their heavy-handed approach to dealing with the galamsey operators in a humane manner to avoid unnecessary casualties. The fair and equitable distribution of mining profits will not only ensure that the many related conflicts are checked but also the country will maximise its revenues from its mineral resources to assist in its development agenda.

Scholars have long argued that effective land based economic growth in the agricultural and business sectors depends on the successful integration of statutory and customary land law. (De Soto, 2000; Ensminger, 1997). It appears that the same holds true for mining

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