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THE YOUNGMEN AND THE PORCUPINE:
CLASS, NATIONALISM AND ASANTE'S STRUGGLE FOR
SELF-DETERMINATION, 1954–57

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At one period Ashanti national sentiment undoubtedly looked forward to the evolution of the country into a separate political unit, in which the Confederacy Council would be the recognized organ of the legislative and administrative authority. But the political integration of Ashanti with the Gold Coast Colony effected by the constitution of 1946 has for the time being diminished the general interest in this aspiration, nor does there in fact appear to be any substantial grounds for its revival.

W. M. Hailey, 1951

When on a day in September this year a group of Ashanti youth gathered at the heart of Kumasi up the Subin River and swore by the Golden Stool and reinforced their Oath with the pouring of libation to the Great Gods of the Ashanti nation and the slaughtering of a lamb, an act of faith, of great national significance was undertaken.... And so Ashantis, backed by their chiefs and Elders, their sons and daughters, and taking guidance by the shadow of the Golden Stool, are now determined to live and die a Nation.

Pioneer, 27 November 1954

ON 19 September 1954, the National Liberation Movement was inaugurated in Kumase, the historic capital of Asante, before a crowd of over 40,000.¹ Many who gathered at the sacred Subin River that day were dressed in funeral cloth and chanted the Asante war cry, '*Asante Kotoko, woyaa, woyaa yie*'! At precisely midday, the leaders of the new movement unfurled its flag. The flag's green symbolized Asante's rich forests, its gold the rich mineral deposits which lay beneath the earth, and its black the stools of Asante's cherished ancestors. In the centre of the flag stood a large cocoa tree; beneath the tree were a cocoa pod and a porcupine. The graphic was powerful and its symbolism misinterpreted by none. The cocoa pod represented the major source of wealth in Asante and the porcupine (*kotoko*) stood as the age-old

¹ This article, a version of which was presented at the 1988 meeting of the African Studies Association in Chicago, is based on research carried out in Ghana and Great Britain under the auspices of a 1983–4 Fulbright–Hays Dissertation Year Fellowship and a 1988 Grant-in-Aid from the American Council of Learned Societies. I would like to thank Ivor Wilks, Basil Davidson, Tom McCaskie, John Rowe, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and David Roediger for their suggestions and comments on my broader and more lengthy examination of the NLM. See J. Allman, 'The National Liberation Movement and the Asante struggle for self-determination, 1954–1957' (Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1987).

symbol of the Asante war machine. Like the quills of the porcupine, '*wokum apem a, apem be ba*' – 'if you kill a thousand, a thousand more will come'.²

Over the next two and a half years, the National Liberation Movement (NLM) asserted Asante's right to self-determination in the face of Kwame Nkrumah's blueprint for a unitary government in an independent Ghana: a blueprint co-authored and supported by the British colonial government. NLM leaders alternated demands for Asante autonomy within a federated Gold Coast with calls for Asante's complete secession. Violence plagued the major cities of the region as colonial officials watched their model colony teeter on the brink of civil war. For nearly three years most Asante supporters of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) lived in exile in Accra. Indeed, Nkrumah, out of fear for his safety, did not cross the Pra River, the boundary between Asante and the Colony, until well after independence in 1957. In short, the NLM not only posed a serious threat to the stability of Nkrumah's pre-independence government, but it destroyed the illusion, present since 1951 and reflected in Hailey's comment at the beginning of this article, that the Gold Coast's transition to full self-rule would proceed with rapidity and order.

Most scholars who have examined these turbulent years in Ghana's history, drawn by the dynamism and historic destiny of Nkrumah's CPP, have focused their attention on the party which was to lead Ghana to independence. As a result, the NLM has been cast into the murky shadows of historical inquiry and branded as a tribalist, regionalist, parochialist ghost of the past – a fleeting aberration in the Gold Coast-wide struggle against colonial rule.³ Meanwhile, those who have devoted their careers to understanding the specific dynamics of Asante history have seldom ventured beyond the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴ This article is aimed at

² For detailed descriptions of the inauguration, see *Pioneer*, 20 September 1954 and *Daily Graphic*, 20 September 1954.

³ See, for example, B. Amamoo, *The New Ghana* (London, 1958); D. Apter, *Ghana in Transition* (Princeton, 1972); D. Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946–1960* (London, 1964); G. Bing, *Reap the Whirlwind: An Account of Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana from 1950–1966* (London, 1968); F. M. Bourret, *Ghana: The Road to Independence, 1919–1957* (London, 1960); H. Bretton, *The Rise and Fall of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York, 1966).

⁴ While it would be impossible to offer a full listing of works on pre-colonial Asante, a representative sampling might include: K. Arhin, 'Rank and wealth among the Akan', *Africa*, LIII, i (1983), 2–22; *idem.*, 'Peasants in nineteenth-century Asante', *Current Anthropology*, xxiv, iv (1983), 471–80; R. Dumett, 'The rubber trade of the Gold Coast and Asante in the nineteenth century: African innovation and market responsiveness', *J. Afr. Hist.*, XII, i (1971), 79–101; T. Lewin, *Asante Before the British: The Prempean Years, 1875–1900* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1978); T. C. McCaskie, 'Accumulation, wealth and belief in Asante history (to the close of the nineteenth century)', *Africa*, LIII, i (1983), 23–42; *idem.*, 'Accumulation, wealth and belief in Asante history (the twentieth century)', *Africa*, LVI, i (1986), 3–23 and *idem.*, 'Ahyiamu – "A Place of Meeting": an essay on process and event in the history of the Asante State', *J. Afr. Hist.*, xxv, ii (1984), 169–88; R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (New York, 1969; 1st edition, London, 1911); E. Schildkrout (ed.), *The Golden Stool: Studies of the Asante Center and Periphery*, LXV, i of the *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 1987); W. Tordoff, *Ashanti Under the Prempehs, 1888–1935* (London, 1965); I. Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge, 1975); *idem.*, 'Dissidence in Asante politics: two tracts from the late nineteenth century', in I. Abu-Lughod (ed.), *African Themes: Northwestern University*

narrowing that historiographical gap. Its purpose is to extend the oft-debated history of the Asante kingdom into the twentieth century through an examination of the National Liberation Movement. It seeks to understand the NLM on its own terms, as part and parcel of Asante history, not as a brief aberration in the national history of Ghana. Though it is a story of continuity and of Asante tenacity, it is by no means the story of a nation united on an historic march to reclaim its right to self-determination. Indeed, to grapple with the twentieth-century tenacity of Asante nationalism – as manifested in the NLM – is to grapple with the historically-rooted contradictions of that nationalism and to confront many of the social and economic conflicts which pervaded Asante history for at least a century before the NLM's inauguration.

Although many in Accra – CPP members and colonial officials alike – reacted with surprise, if not disbelief, at the news of the NLM's founding, there had been indications as early as November, 1953 that some Asantes were beginning to question the government's blueprint for independence. The first murmurs of discontent arose during the debate over the distribution of seats for the new Legislative Assembly – the body envisioned as leading the Gold Coast to independence. A government report provided for the allocation of seats based on the population of the regions, allotting Kumase two seats and the Region nineteen.⁵ In a legislative body which was to contain 104 seats, roughly 20 per cent would represent Asante. This allocation reflected a decline from Asante's 25 per cent share of seats in the 1951 Council. As far as the Asante representatives were concerned, the report reflected a total insensitivity to the historic, economic and political importance of Asante to the Gold Coast. Asante, they argued, should be entitled to no fewer than thirty seats. B. F. Kusi, who had resigned from the CPP a year earlier and who would become a staunch supporter of the NLM a year later, told the Council:

All Ashantis express the sentiment that Ashanti is a nation and that fact has been accepted. We are not a region at all; we should be considered as a nation.... Population alone does not make a country.⁶

But despite the burning nationalist pleas of many Asante representatives, the government's report was adopted. Many in Asante decried what they considered to be the government's total insensitivity to Asante's special position in the Gold Coast. Their bitterness was not to subside quickly.

A few months later, Asante discontent with the CPP surfaced within the offices of the CPP itself. As the June 1954 election approached – the election heralded as the last before independence – CPP candidates had to be chosen to stand for the 21 seats in Asante. In many cases, local constituencies disapproved of the candidates selected by Nkrumah and the CPP's Central

Studies in Honor of Gwendolyn Carter (Evanston, 1975), 47–63 and *idem.*, 'The Golden Stool and the Elephant Tail: an essay on wealth in Asante', in G. Dalton (ed.), *Research in Economic Anthropology*, 11 (1970), 1–36. See, also, I. Wilks and T. McCaskie (eds.), *Asantesem: Bulletin of the Asante Collective Biography Project*, 1–11 (1975–9).

⁵ Gold Coast, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Representational and Electoral Reform* [Chairman: Van Lare] (Accra, 1953).

⁶ See Gold Coast, Legislative Assembly, *Debates*, 4–17 November 1953, *passim*.

Committee and submitted their own candidates for registration, defying the party's central authority.⁷ As the election drew near some members agreed to accept party directives and removed their names from the ballot, but 32 in Asante chose to stand as independent candidates. Nine days before the election these Asante candidates were among the 81 'rebels', as Nkrumah termed them, publicly expelled from the CPP at a mass rally held in the Subin River valley in Kumase.⁸ But the Subin valley had not seen the last of the Asante rebels.

On 13 August, the government passed an amendment to the Cocoa Duty and Development Funds Bill which fixed the price of cocoa at 72 shillings per 60 lb. load – a price which represented only one-third of the average prevailing world market price.⁹ The Asante rebels were among those who galvanized opposition in Asante to this government ruling; in the process they transformed the campaign for a higher cocoa price into a political struggle. A leaflet circulating in early September, authored by one of the rebels, made the political connections explicit:

Ashantis produce more cocoa than the colony. IS THERE ANY COCOA IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORIES [*sic*]? NO! Why should Government tax cocoa farmers to develop the country in which Ashantis suffer most?... Ashantis! Save Your Nation and let others know that we are no FOOLS BUT WISE, kind and also we have the Worrior [*sic*] Spirit of Our Great Ancestors Within Us.¹⁰

It was abundantly clear that cocoa and *Kotoko* would stand at the heart of the struggle. Within a few weeks, Asante opposition to the cocoa price mushroomed into a broad-based Asante struggle against the CPP, its economic policies and its blueprint for self-government. The *Ashanti Pioneer*, a local paper whose owner, John Tsiboe, had opposed the CPP from its inception, published an editorial which proclaimed:

Great events... from little causes spring. Like an innocent match flame, the strange attitude of the all African CPP Government to the simple demand of farmers for a higher local price of cocoa has gone a long way to threaten to set ablaze the petrol dump of Ashanti nationalism.¹¹

On 19 September, in the Subin River valley, that 'petrol dump' was officially ignited as tens of thousands participated in the inauguration of the Asante National Liberation Movement.

⁷ Austin, *Politics*, 201. See also, *Pioneer*, 8 May 1954 for an account of local CPP officers' discontent over Nkrumah's appointing of candidates.

⁸ As Nkrumah wrote, 'I called these people "rebels". Firm action had to be taken. It was vital that the Party should not be allowed to become disorganised or to be weakened by the split that this would ultimately bring about': K. Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London, 1957), 208.

⁹ For the debates surrounding the passage of the Cocoa Duty and Development Funds (Amendment) Bill, see Gold Coast, Legislative Assembly, *Debates*, 12–13 August 1954. In 1953–54, the producer price per ton of cocoa stood at £134.40, while the average selling price obtained on the world market was £358.70. See B. Beckman, 'Government policy and the distribution of cocoa income in Ghana, 1951–56', Cocoa Economic and Research Conference, *Proceedings* (Legon, 1973), 285.

¹⁰ E. Y. Baffoe, 'Cocoa price agitation' (Kumase, 1954). Copies of this leaflet and others were given to the author by Osei Assibey Mensah. They have been placed on deposit in the Melville J. Herskovits Memorial Library, Northwestern University.

¹¹ *Pioneer*, 4 September 1954.

Who was behind this massive resurgence of Asante nationalism? Who in Asante was capable of mobilizing a broad-based popular front of resistance against the government? Who welded the issue of cocoa to the spirit and grievances of *Asante Kotoko*? Scholars primarily concerned with the early years of Ghana national history have offered a variety of answers to these questions. Some, influenced by Clifford Geertz and the notion of 'national integration', saw the NLM as an almost inevitable response to the all-encompassing sovereign civil state – an expression of the primordial attachments of Asantes on the eve of independence.¹² Others, writing after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966, assumed the same Ghana-wide historical perspective as did the 'integrationists'. However, they argued in more materialist terms that the NLM was the product of large-scale cocoa farmers, powerful chiefs and businessmen, who exploited tribal attachments to gain the support of Asante workers and peasants in a class struggle against Nkrumah and his party.¹³

Only Richard Rathbone's work, based on extensive research in Asante, has revealed the theoretical limitations of attempts to understand the dynamics of the NLM solely within the context of Ghana national history. Rathbone recognized that the driving force behind the formation of the NLM was not the 'big men' of Asante and that the NLM could not be dismissed as simply the enigmatic expression of primordial attachments. Those responsible for the resurgence of Asante nationalism, for the forging of an Asante popular front of resistance against the CPP were, as Rathbone correctly argued, Asante's youngmen – those very same men who had spearheaded the CPP drive into Asante in 1949–51.¹⁴

Rathbone made a significant analytical leap in singling out the CPP rebels and their comrades in the Asante Youth Association (AYA) as the catalyst to the political upheaval of the mid-1950's. However, by focusing his concern on the wider contemporary struggle between the youngmen and the CPP during the transfer of power, he did not explore the historical dimension of his ground-breaking analysis. He saw the youngmen as a post-World War II phenomenon: Asante's version of the post-secondary school-leavers, the first mass-politicized generation. While this analysis goes a long way toward

¹² For a summary of national integration theory, see C. Geertz, 'The integrative revolution: primordial sentiments and civil politics in the new states', in Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States* (New York, 1963), 109–30. See also, Apter, *Ghana*; *idem.*, 'Ghana', in J. S. Coleman and C. Rosberg (eds.), *Political Parties and National Integration* (Berkeley, 1965), 259–315; *idem.*, 'The role of traditionalism in the political modernization of Ghana and Uganda', *World Politics*, XIII (1960), 45–68; *idem.*, 'Some reflections on the role of a political opposition in new nations', *Comparative Studies in Society and Hist.*, IV (1961), 154–68; Austin, *Politics*; *idem.*, 'Opposition in Ghana: 1947–1967', *Government and Opposition*, II, iv (1967), 539–55.

¹³ See, especially, B. Fitch and M. Oppenheimer, *Ghana: End of an Illusion* (New York, 1966), 59–60.

¹⁴ See R. Rathbone, 'Businessmen and politics: party struggle in Ghana, 1949–1957', *J. Development Studies*, IX, iii (1973), 390–401. See also Rathbone, 'Opposition in Ghana: the National Liberation Movement', *Political Opposition in the New African States* (University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Collected Seminar Paper Series, No. IV), 29–53; *idem.*, 'Politics and factionalism in Ghana', *Current History*, LX, ccclv (March, 1971), 164–7; *idem.*, 'The transfer of power in Ghana, 1945–1957' (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1968).

explaining the immediate thrust behind the resurgence of Asante nationalism, it cannot account for the conflicts and contradictions inherent in that nationalism; for the events of 1954–7 did not simply represent the struggle of Asante's youngmen against the government of the CPP. Those events also reflected the historically rooted struggle within Asante (and within the NLM) between the aspiring youngmen and the established powers of Asante. It was the outcome of this long struggle, not the lone and immediate aspirations of the youngmen, which would determine the course of Asante's quest for autonomy.

The youngmen of Asante had been a potent and active political force since at least the mid-nineteenth century when they were known as the *nkwanakwa*, a term which has been consistently rendered in English as 'youngmen'. The sense of the term was not that the *nkwanakwa* were literally 'young', but that they existed in often uneasy subordination to elder or chiefly authority.¹⁵ As Wilks writes of the nineteenth-century *nkwanakwa*, they were men who 'belonged to old and well-established families but whose personal expectations of succeeding to office or even of acquiring wealth were low'.¹⁶ Channels for political advancement were obstructed by the traditional requirements of office; channels for economic advancement were obstructed by both the state and its monopoly on trade and what could be termed the rising bourgeoisie or *asikafo* (literally, 'men of gold' or 'rich men').¹⁷ Perhaps best described as an emerging petite bourgeoisie, with an economic base in trading and rubber production and economic interests directed at the establishment of free and unencumbered trade with the coast, the *nkwanakwa*, according to Wilks, probably acquired 'their first experience of political action in the anti-war and anti-conscription movements' of the late 1860s and early 1870s.¹⁸ It was in the 1880s, however, that the *nkwanakwa* made their first serious bid for political power in Asante. It was the Kumase *nkwanakwa* who, angered when *Asantehene* Mensa Bonsu raised taxes and imposed heavy fines for petty offenses, took a leading role in the movement which eventually overthrew the *Asantehene* in 1883.¹⁹ Capable of mobilizing the support of the *ahiafo* (the 'poor' or 'under-privileged'), and in alliance with the *asikafo*, whose economic standing was also threatened by Mensa Bonsu's austerity measures and his state trading system, the *nkwanakwa*

¹⁵ The etymology of the term '*nkwanakwa*' is somewhat murky. Its root is undoubtedly '*nkoa*' which can be translated as 'subject' or 'commoner'. But as Busia noted, *nkwanakwa* was often used synonymously with *mmerante* (literally, 'young men'). Clearly, *nkwanakwa* has come to have a very specific meaning – much more limited than 'commoner', and transcending, in many cases, the chronological or generational designation of *mmerante*. (During the 1950s, the youngmen active in the NLM ranged in age from twenty to fifty.) See Tordoff, *Ashanti*, 374 ff. and K. A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti* (London, 1951), 10 ff. In reference to the nineteenth century, Wilks defines *nkwanakwa* as 'literally "youngmen" and sometimes translated as "commoner"'. Wilks, *Asante*, 728.

¹⁶ Wilks, *Asante*, 535.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 535–9 and 710–11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 535. Unfortunately, more precise data on the early *nkwanakwa* are not available. As Wilks points out, 'The leaders... in the early 1880's, as is appropriate to a movement which although popular and mass-based had necessarily to be organized in secrecy, are not identified in contemporary reports' (p. 535). Thus, it is difficult not only to pinpoint the *nkwanakwa*'s origins in time but to examine their specific social and economic grievances.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 530.

were able to carry out a successful coup against the *Asantehene*; and since they were 'unconvinced of the virtues of a monarchical system', they were able to bring Kumase under a 'republican form of government' or a 'Council of commoners and chiefs', albeit for only a brief period.²⁰

Though the *nkwankwaa* had made a serious bid for political power in the 1880s, their long-term goals differed markedly from those of the *asikafo* and *ahiafo*. In the last years of Asante sovereignty, the *nkwankwaa* were unable to forge a lasting political alliance capable of effecting a dramatic change in Asante politics.²¹ By 1901, Asante was under the complete control of the British and the *nkwankwaa* faced an entirely new political and economic landscape. In the first three-and-a-half decades of the century, before the consolidation of indirect rule in Asante, the *nkwankwaa*, according to a 1924 colonial report, enjoyed a 'feeling of independence and safety which gives vent to criticism of their elders, and a desire when dissatisfied to take the law into their own hands'.²² Their relationship with Asante's traditional authorities remained uneasy at best. Throughout the 1920s, the *nkwankwaa*'s involvement in destoolment cases against numerous *amanhene* ('paramount chiefs') alarmed government officials and traditional authorities alike.²³ With their social and economic position bolstered by the growth in trade and the spread of education, the *nkwankwaa* became more resentful of the powers exercised by the chiefs, namely their ability to levy taxes and impose communal labor requirements. In 1930, the *nkwankwaa* were particularly outraged by news that the *Kumasihene*, Nana Prempe I, and his chiefs were considering a law which would require that a percentage of a deceased person's property be given to the *Kumasihene* and his chiefs. In a letter to the Chief Commissioner, they warned that it was a similar measure which led to the overthrow of Mensa Bonsu in 1883. After discussions with the Chief Commissioner, Nana Prempe I dropped the issue.²⁴

That the *nkwankwaa* have origins dating back nearly a century before the founding of the NLM clearly has implications for our understanding of the events of 1954–7. Specifically, these pre-colonial origins allow for an historical (though admittedly tentative) class analysis of the youngmen – an analysis which repeatedly points to the *nkwankwaa*'s reliance upon strategic alliances or popular fronts which they have forged with other groups in Asante society to further their own aims, be it an end to conscription, the abolition of communal labour, a lessening in taxes, or the opening up of free trade with the Coast. The *nkwankwaa* have been artful initiators of these alliances, capable of winning the support of the *asikafo* and *ahiafo*. Historically, they have also turned to the chiefs (or certain elements within the ruling elite) to gain the support and legitimacy necessary to further their causes.

That the *nkwankwaa* have had to turn to others, particularly to the chiefs, points to their weakness as a class. It also goes some distance toward explaining their pivotal and dynamic role in the turbulence of Asante politics

²⁰ For a brief description of the Council or *kwasafohyiamu*, see Wilks, *Asante*, 540. For additional interpretations of the tumultuous events of 1880–4, see Lewin, *Asante*, 69–76 and 115–16, and McCaskie, 'Ahyiamu', 169–89.

²¹ Wilks, *Asante*, 710.

²² Great Britain, *Colonial Reports*, Ashanti, 1923–4, cited in Tordoff, *Ashanti*, 204.

²³ Tordoff, *Ashanti*, 375–82. ²⁴ *Ibid.* 268.

over the past century. The *nkwankwaa* have displayed an historical ability to take advantage of the fluid nature of Asante politics since the 1880s – galvanizing support in frequently opposing camps around common, though perhaps fleeting, issues, playing power against power. They accomplished this in 1883; and in 1934, in alliance with most of the Asante chiefs, they staged an important, though unsuccessful, hold-up of cocoa in response to the low price being paid for the crop by European merchants. In the following year, partly in response to the growing challenge the *nkwankwaa* posed to traditional authority, the British government decided to centralize that authority by restoring the Asante Confederacy Council, with the *Asantehene* at its helm. Some of the youngmen of Kumase, perhaps in an effort to tear apart the recently restored Confederacy, then collaborated with the *Dadeaso-abahene*, *Bantamahene*, *Akyempemhene* and *Adumhene* in a plot to remove the *Asantehene*, Prempe II, from the Golden Stool.²⁵ The conspiracy was quickly uncovered, but the fact that ‘irresponsible agitators’ could win the support of such prominent chiefs required drastic action. Less than a year later, during 1936, the Council took matters into its own hands: in response to the *nkwankwaa*’s vocal opposition to the colonial government’s reconstitution of the Confederacy, their reluctance to perform various communal services and their role in the destoolments of so many paramount chiefs, including the attempt to destool the *Asantehene*, the Asante Confederacy Council abolished the office of *Nkwankwaahene* (‘leader of the youngmen’) and all *nkwankwaa* organizations.²⁶ The traditional position of *Nkwankwaahene* was not hereditary, nor did it confer membership in any council (whether local or divisional), but it did provide a recognized channel through which the youngmen could collectively criticize the government.²⁷ It was that channel the Confederacy Council sought to destroy. But the *nkwankwaa*’s dissatisfaction could not be eradicated so easily. The Confederacy Council could not simply legislate away the historically entrenched *nkwankwaa* who were intent on attaining political power commensurate with their newly acquired Western education, their growing economic power via the expanding cocoa economy and their widening roles as the clerks, teachers and accountants of the new colonial bureaucracy.

In many ways, the Asante Youth Association, founded in 1947, came to assume the role and functions of the abolished *nkwankwaa* organizations, as its members shared common characteristics, as well as common grievances, with their counterparts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁸ Most AYA members came from well-established families, but had no prospects of succeeding to traditional office. Their economic and social base remained petit bourgeois, but there had been many important changes over

²⁵ Tordoff, *Ashanti*, 365–9.

²⁶ Asante Confederacy Council, *Minutes of the Second Session*, 23 January 1936.

²⁷ For discussions of the role of the *Nkwankwaahene*, see Busia, *Position*, 10 and Tordoff, *Ashanti*, 373–4 and 383.

²⁸ Two years before the AYA was founded, Fortes was in Asante completing his ‘Ashanti Social Survey’. He observed that, despite the formal prohibition of the *nkwankwaa* ten years earlier, youngmen’s associations and self-help groups (modeled on the *nkwankwaa* organizations) continued to give expression to the ‘opinions of commoners’. See M. Fortes, ‘The Ashanti Social Survey: a preliminary report’, *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, vi (1948), 26–8 and esp. 26 ff.

the last fifty years. No longer rooted primarily in petty trade and small scale rubber production, the youngmen of the post-World War II period were an economically diverse lot. Most had attained some degree of education which led them into such burgeoning occupations as journalism, teaching, accounting and clerking.²⁹ Some were shopkeepers and small-scale traders and some, were involved in cocoa production (if only in a small way). They were not chiefs (though many were related to chiefs) and they had no realizable aspirations to chiefly office. They can also be distinguished from the old guard intelligentsia – the relatively sparse, though politically significant, group of Asante professionals like K. A. Busia and I. B. Asafu-Adjaye – who had been trained to inherit the government upon the departure of the British, but who had been left out after the dynamic rise of the CPP. They were not the indigent or *ahiafo*, nor were they the *asikafo* whose wealth was based in a powerful combination of land ownership, large-scale cocoa and timber production, trading, transport and construction.³⁰ They were, quite simply, the youngmen, the *nkwankwaa*, or, for lack of a less cumbersome class definition, the petite bourgeoisie.

Perhaps what most distinguished the youngmen of the post-World War II era from the *nkwankwaa* of the previous decades was that they participated in (and, in some cases, helped to initiate) the mass nationalist movement. Many, including Kusi Ampofu, Osei Assibey-Mensah and Sam Boateng, played key roles in the founding of the CPP in 1949. For them, Nkrumah's party was the organization of the 'common man', the vanguard in a struggle against colonial rule and against the power and privilege of chiefly authority. Thus, the youngmen spearheaded the CPP drive into Asante and, in the process, they mastered the arts of mass mobilization, organization and propaganda. Only a few years later, these skills would be put to the test when the youngmen broke with the CPP and prepared to 'fight fire with fire'.

In 1954, though the political and economic landscape of Asante had changed dramatically since the 1880s, the goals of the Asante *nkwankwaa* were not so different from those of their predecessors. The youngmen continued to seek political power, and through it, economic power. However, instead of confronting the Asante state, the *nkwankwaa* were now confronting

²⁹ It is interesting to note that the four AYA members who played the most pivotal roles in the founding of the NLM – Kusi Ampofu, Sam Boateng, K. A. M. Gyimah and Osei Assibey-Mensah – were all journalists by trade.

³⁰ This is not to suggest that in the Asante of the 1950s there were four neatly packaged social classes or groups – the chiefs, the *asikafo*, the *nkwankwaa* and the *ahiafo*. The categories were not mutually exclusive, particularly with reference to the chiefs and the 'big men' or *asikafo*. Many chiefs, particularly the Kumase Divisional Chiefs (*nsafohene*), were wealthy landowners with an economic base in cocoa, transport and trading. At the same time, many of the *asikafo* aspired to traditional office and much of their wealth and power depended on maintaining a close relationship with, and courting the favours of, the traditional ruling powers. In an article dealing with wealth and political power in the nineteenth century, but with applicability to the twentieth century, Wilks notes that 'the analytically distinct categories of the office holders (*amansohwefo*) and the wealthy (*asikafo*) are, in terms of actual membership, largely overlapping ones; that is, office holders became wealthy through the exercise of their office, and persons of wealth acquired office through the use of their money'. Wilks, 'The Golden Stool', 17 and *passim*.

the CPP – a party which they had helped to found and build, a party through which they had sought to reach the political kingdom and all else that would follow.³¹ Their break with the CPP, though precipitated by the freezing of the cocoa price, was based primarily on a growing perception that the CPP was no longer providing a means toward political and economic advancement; it was no longer offering the political kingdom to the majority of Asante's youngmen. The government's allocation of seats in the Legislative Assembly and the CPP's selection of candidates for the 1954 election were cited as *prima facie* evidence that the CPP did not and could not represent the youngmen of Asante. The freezing of the cocoa price and a development policy that was based on the expropriation of wealth from Asante cocoa farmers only served to reinforce the youngmen's growing alarm that the CPP was seeking to build its kingdom on the backs of Asantes *without* giving the youngmen of Asante a voice in that kingdom or allowing them to reap its rewards.

And just as the *nkwankwaa* of the 1880s had turned to *Akyempemhene* Owusu Koko in their bid to depose Mensa Bonsu, the youngmen of the 1950s turned to the paramount chiefs of Asante in an effort to legitimize their movement, culturally and politically, against Nkrumah. They believed that the support of the chiefs was an ideological necessity: the chiefs would bring with them the support of the spirits and ancestors of the entire nation and the struggle against Nkrumah would become the struggle of the Asante nation against political slavery, economic slavery and 'black imperialism'.³²

It was recognized in September, 1954 that winning the support of the chiefs would take time and would require tactical manoeuvring, because the chiefs, not without cause, viewed the youngmen of the AYA as traitors. Only months before the NLM's inauguration, the *nkwankwaa* had been adamant supporters of the CPP and were directly associated with the CPP's oft-quoted policy of 'making the chiefs run away and leave their sandals behind'. At the same time, however, the chiefs could ill afford to turn away from any movement which held out the promise of effectively challenging Nkrumah and his attempts to curtail chiefly power. Thus, in an effort at reconciliation with the chiefs, the youngmen coupled their demands for a higher cocoa price and Asante autonomy within a federated Gold Coast with a call for the preservation of chieftancy and posited themselves as the defenders of that 'sacred institution'. As one editorial remarked,

... the youth of Ashanti have made it supremely clear that they would NEVER see the sandals removed from the Ahemfie [palace] to the Arena, the Subin Valley, or even the National museum. They would rather them still [be] kept in the Ahemfie so that the Chiefs could come out of their hide-outs and wear them again.³³

In another strategic move to enlist the chiefs' support, the youngmen

³¹ This is a paraphrasing of Nkrumah's famous statement, 'Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all things will be added unto you'. *Pioneer*, 5 March 1949. See also Fitch and Oppenheimer, *Ghana*, 25.

³² As Dennis Austin so perceptively argued twenty-five years ago, 'those who saw the conflict that was arising between the farmers and the government as one affecting the rights and interests of Ashanti, were also ready to see the chiefs as still the most potent symbol of Ashanti unity'. See Austin, *Politics*, 259.

³³ *Pioneer*, 6 September 1954.

persuaded Bafuor Osei Akoto, one of the *Asantehene's* senior linguists or *akyeame*, to serve as the new Movement's chairman. Akoto was, as *West Africa* reported, 'persona grata to Otumfuo himself as well as to most Ashanti Paramount and Divisional Chiefs'.³⁴ He could provide the youngmen with a direct mouthpiece to the most important traditional rulers in Asante. Moreover, as a former apprentice engineer and fitter and as a major cocoa producer in his own right, Akoto virtually personified the popular front the youngmen were attempting to build. He was a man capable of bridging the gap between chiefs and commoners, cocoa farmers and urban wage earners. Bolstered by Akoto's presence, it was not long before the youngmen made headway with Asante's chiefs. On 11 October, the Kumase State Council voted openly to support the NLM and sealed their vow of support with the swearing of the Great Oath of Asante and with the decision to withdraw 20,000 pounds from the *Asantehene's* New Palace Building Fund for the support of the Movement.³⁵ Ten days later, the Asanteman Council gave the NLM its full endorsement.³⁶ Thus, step by step in the days surrounding the inauguration, the youngmen began to forge a popular front of resistance against Nkrumah and the CPP. The links of that front, which bound cocoa farmer to chief to youngman, were forged with the fire of Asante nationalism.

This nationalism was, from the very onset, the justifying ideology of the Movement. It was not, however, its *raison d'être*. The youngmen did not spearhead the formation of the NLM because, as one of their leaflets proclaimed, 'Asante has history'. Their reaction was far from being a primordial, tribal or traditional response thrown up in the face of a new all-encompassing sovereign civil state. Rather, the youngmen's invocation of Asante nationalism represented the very modern use and construction of an ideology to justify opposition to the CPP, to rationalize and legitimize that opposition and, most importantly, to mobilize support and forge the links of a popular front of resistance under their control and direction. That Asante had existed as an independent historic kingdom, though useful, was of secondary importance to the creation of the NLM's unifying ideology, its myth of tradition. Of primary importance were the social, political and class dynamics which shaped the construction of that ideology.

Asante in the 1950s provided fertile ground for the nationalist message of the youngmen. It was a message which appealed to the large class of peasant producers of cocoa who had been unable to mobilize effectively against the price freeze. It appealed to the chiefs who had feared that any vocal opposition to Nkrumah on their part would lead to a further erosion in power.³⁷ It appealed to the old guard intelligentsia who had lost the political

³⁴ *West Africa*, 11 December 1954, 1161. This article contains a brief biography of Bafuor Akoto.

³⁵ Kumase State Council, *Minutes*, 11 October 1954.

³⁶ See *Daily Graphic*, 30 October 1954 and 6 November 1954. See also Public Record Office, Colonial Office [hereafter, PRO, CO.] 554/804: 'A Resolution by the Asanteman Council Praying for a Federal Constitution for the Gold Coast', dd. Kumase, 21 October 1954.

³⁷ Having experienced considerable power under the indirect rule system of the 1930s and 1940s, the chiefs foresaw their authority and their power being increasingly undermined by the centralization strategies of the CPP, the creation of local councils to assume the duties and functions of the old Native Authorities and the refusal of the CPP

moment to Nkrumah and had shown themselves incapable of mobilizing mass support.³⁸ Only the *nkwankwaa*, with their long history of forging alliances and their recent experience, via the CPP, of mass mobilization techniques and propaganda, were in the position and had the tools necessary to fertilize and cultivate the grounds of opposition in Asante. They were the political catalyst, just as they had been in the 1880s. They were the only class capable of articulating their *specific* aspirations for political and economic advancement – aspirations which had been historically thwarted by the pre-colonial Asante state, by the structure of indirect rule and now by the bureaucratization and centralization of the CPP – as general Asante aspirations. In short, the youngmen were able to hold together an all-embracing ideology which could articulate the varied and often conflicting aspirations of Asantes. Standing on the platform at the Subin River they presented themselves as ‘the people’ – the new ideologues of Asante nationalism. They fanned the fires of discontent by pointing to the failures, limitations and corruption of the reigning nationalist movement. They raised the issue of cocoa and resurrected *Asante Kotoko*.

For several months after the inauguration of the NLM, Asante’s youngmen appeared to rule the day. Their burning nationalist rhetoric, their threats of secession and their ability to mobilize broad masses of the population in Asante engendered fear in the hearts of many a colonial official who watched as Britain’s model colony disintegrated before their eyes. One official in London described his apprehension

that there might be organized in Ashanti a strong-arm group using firearms who would be prepared, if the need arose, to take to the forest. The country is such that it would not be difficult for 200/300 young men suitably armed to stage a Mau Mau of their own.³⁹

Meanwhile, Governor Arden-Clark lamented in a letter home to his wife that the Asantes ‘are nearly as difficult and unruly as the Scots once were [and] have suddenly decided that they don’t like the present Government, want Home Rule for Ashanti, and are vociferously demanding a Federal Constitution’.⁴⁰ By the end of 1954, the colonial government had begun to draw up security schemes and emergency evacuation measures in the event of an all-out civil war.⁴¹

to incorporate a second, Upper House into the independence-bound parliament. As Arhin writes, ‘they regarded Nkrumah and his party as parvenus, usurpers of power from the legitimate heirs to the British’. See K. Arhin, ‘Chieftancy under Kwame Nkrumah’, paper presented at the Symposium on the Life and Work of Kwame Nkrumah, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana (Legon, 27 May–1 June, 1985), 5.

³⁸ As Richard Wright so eloquently observed of J. B. Danquah – the personification of the old guard: ‘He was of the old school. One did not speak *for* the masses; one told them what to do’. See R. Wright, *Black Power* (New York, 1954), 221.

³⁹ PRO, CO. 554/1276: File Minute, dd. 17 May 1955.

⁴⁰ Cited in D. Rooney, *Sir Charles Arden-Clarke* (London, 1982), 159.

⁴¹ The ‘Ashanti Zone Internal Security Schemes’ were authored by the Chief Regional Officer in Asante. All copies of the ‘Schemes’ were to be destroyed by fire immediately after they were read and digested by district officers and members of the Ashanti Zone Intelligence Committee consisting of representatives of the colonial administration in Asante, the Police and the Army. Fortunately, one of the ‘Schemes’ survived – No. IV, dated February, 1957. That ‘Scheme’ suggests that the first concerted security plans were

Perhaps these emergency plans were not entirely unwarranted. For a period of several months, Asante appeared to have seceded in fact, if not in name. When the Governor visited Kumase in March, 1955, he was forced to lie flat on the seat of his car to escape the barrage of stones hurled at him.⁴² The irreverence shown by the people in Kumase that day for the highest ranking British official in the Gold Coast was unlike any seen since 1948. It was topped off during the minutes that Arden-Clarke spent greeting the *Asantehene*. During that time, 'one of the NLM boys,' recalled K. A. M. Gyimah, '... went and sat in his [Arden-Clarke's] car, and he said that the car belonged to us!'⁴³ The symbolism of the youngman's actions was clear to all: the colonial Governor, by siding with Nkrumah on the nature of the post-independence state, had thrown in his lot with the CPP. Thus, neither he nor his vehicle were sacrosanct. The youngman's occupation of the car stood as a popular declaration of Asante's right to confiscate or reclaim that very symbol of colonial officialdom, the Governor's limousine.

Among the NLM's rank-and-file, a popular culture of resistance emerged which was a strange tapestry of old and new, unmistakably Asante, undeniably contemporary. It combined the palanquin and the propaganda van, the gong-gong and the megaphone, the war dance and the rally. Women wore cloth bearing faces of Asante nationalist heroes. There were NLM drumming and dance troupes. And there were, finally, the NLM Action Groupers – that self-styled vigilante group aimed at ridding the region of CPP supporters.⁴⁴ A *New Republic* journalist, after attending an NLM rally, was both amused and confused by the Movement's Groupers:

...they dressed in the movie version of American cowboy costumes, black satin with white fringe, and they wore high-heeled black, Texas boots brilliantly studded with the letters NLM and the words 'King Force'. They were called to the platform ... and sang a song. I was told that their throwing arms were not impeded by their tight clothing, and that most of the bomb damage in Kumase, rightly or wrongly, was attributed to them.⁴⁵

developed in 1954, then updated in 1955 and 1956, to deal with the threat posed to security by the NLM. The 'Schemes' included detailed information on intelligence gathering and on evacuation plans, noting that in the event of 'civil war or guerrilla war' the scheme would be superseded by a central plan devised in Accra. See National Archives of Ghana, Kumase, Regional Office Administration/2842: 'Ashanti Zone Internal Security Scheme', dd. Kumase, February, 1957.

⁴² *Pioneer*, 23 March 1955; *West Africa*, 26 March 1955, 279.

⁴³ J. Allman, Field Notes: interview with K. A. M. Gyimah (FN/9/1), dd. Manhyia, Kumase, 20 July 1984, 73.

⁴⁴ The Action Groupers were formed in October, 1954, shortly after the murder of the Movement's Propaganda Secretary, E. Y. Baffoe, by a member of the CPP. Three youngmen – Sam Boateng, Frank Tawiah, and Kwaku Danso (a.k.a. 'Burning Spear') – were instrumental in organizing the group. It was first led by Fred Sarpong, a journalist, but after he became involved in publishing the NLM's newspaper, the *Liberator*, the Groupers were taken over by Alex Osei. See Allman, Field Notes: interview with Sam Boateng (FN/6/1), dd. Adum, Kumase, 3 July 1984, 39–40 and interview with Alex Osei (FN/3/1), dd. Asante New Town, Kumase, 26 June 1984, 11–14.

⁴⁵ A. Kendrick, 'Growing up to be a Nation', *New Republic*, 23 April 1956, 15–16. Cited in Yaw Manu, 'Conflict and consensus in Ghanaian politics: the case of the 1950's', *Conch*, vi, i–ii (1975), 103.

One can only hypothesize on the symbolism of the Groupers' attire. To a Western journalist it may have appeared incongruous, gaudy, perhaps even ridiculous. But the brilliant outfits of the Action Groupers were part and parcel of the new popular resistance in Asante, a marriage of old and new. The attire befitted the modern-day Asante warrior.

For several months, the youngmen seemed to preside over this popular culture of resistance, this resurrection of *Asante Kotoko*. Their potency as catalysts, nationalist ideologues and, at times, rabble-rousers, appeared unchallenged and unchallengeable as every Asante's political and economic grievance seemed to be brought under the nationalist rubric. Yet the historical conflicts and contradictions in Asante society could not be negated by or even subsumed within the NLM. In resurrecting *Asante Kotoko*, in enlisting the support of the chiefs, the *asikafo* and the old guard intelligentsia, the youngmen had turned to those very powers who had historically thwarted their bid for political power within Asante. The youngmen thus found themselves pitted against Asante's ruling class in a modern-day struggle over the very definition of Asante self-determination. It was a struggle the youngmen were bound to lose.

By the Movement's first anniversary, it was clear that the youngmen's power within the NLM was rapidly eroding, that control of the Movement was slipping irretrievably from their grasp. Though the youngmen continued to play very visible roles at Movement rallies and as writers for the NLM paper, the *Liberator*, their positions as leaders and decision-makers were gradually usurped by the long-established powers in Asante: the chiefs, the intelligentsia and the *Asantehene*. As one youngman recently recalled, '... those who were paying the money for the organization were the people who were actually dictating'.⁴⁶ When push came to shove, the energy and zeal of the youngmen were no match for the power and money of the chiefs backed by the political savvy and experience of the intelligentsia. The NLM's Finance Committee, which, according to one youngman, kept its affairs a closely guarded secret, was chaired by the *Kronkohene*, Nana Kwabena Amoo.⁴⁷ As early as February, 1954, at the insistence of the *Asantehene*, Kusi Ampofu – a leader of the AYA – was replaced by R. R. Amponsah as the Movement's General Secretary. Amponsah, a member of the royal family of Mampon, left the CPP only days before he assumed this top position in the NLM.⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, Victor Owusu (a member of the Agona royal family who abandoned the CPP the same week as did Amponsah and Joe Appiah) became an ex-officio member of the Asanteman Council. Slowly, and perhaps imperceptibly at first, the NLM's seat of

⁴⁶ Allman, Field Notes: interview with N. B. Abubekr (FN/16/1), dd. Akowuasaw, Kumase, 28 July 1984, 127.

⁴⁷ N. B. Abubekr recently remarked that if anyone needed money, 'they simply went to Bafuor Akoto and he gave them money ... Our knowledge of our accounts was limited only to that ... We didn't know how much we had and we were not told what expenditures there were and all that'. See Allman, Field Notes: interview with N. B. Abubekr (FN/16/2), dd. Akowuasaw, Kumase, 10 October 1984, 189.

⁴⁸ For Kusi Ampofu's reactions to Amponsah's appointment, see Allman, Field Notes: interview with Kusi Ampofu (FN/24/1), dd. Asante New Town, Kumase, 15 October 1984, 198. For the reactions of other youngmen, see Allman, interview with N. B. Abubekr (FN/16/1), dd. Akowuasaw, Kumase, 28 July 1984, 127.

power was moved from the organization headquarters to the *Asantehene's* Palace at Manhyia.

While ex-CPP stalwarts like Amponsah and Owusu and old guard intellectuals from the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) like K. A. Busia and I. B. Asafu-Adjaye, not to mention Asante's chiefs, had been at political odds for years, their differences quickly faded in the context of the NLM. A process of consolidation occurred within Asante's ruling ranks, in which the *Asantehene* was instrumental. Nana Osei Agyeman Prempe II was the caretaker of the Golden Stool, the symbol of traditional political authority and the symbolic link between Asante's pre-colonial and colonial past and its present. He was the inspiration for and focus of Asante nationalism. Whoever received his recognition as the legitimate leadership of the NLM would become the Movement's indisputable leadership. In bestowing that recognition the *Asantehene* turned to those who shared his ideological and material interests, those who sought to preserve their own economic and social privilege. He turned to Asante's chiefs, its political intelligentsia, and its *asikafo* because he feared the youngmen and the rabble they could so easily rouse. Perhaps he perceived a threat that if the youngmen retained control of the Movement, they would define Asante self-determination on their own terms or, worse yet, on the terms of those rank-and-file supporters who had stoned the Governor's limousine.⁴⁹ In short, the *Asantehene* turned to Asante's fragmented ruling class, including ex-CPP and ex-UGCC political intellectuals, *asikafo* and chiefs, united them and empowered them.

What could the *nkwankwaa* do in response to the consolidation of Asante's ruling class and its usurpation of the NLM? Nothing: the youngmen's potency as catalysts, ideologues and rabble-rousers was inextricably bound up with their impotence as a class. The very ideology they had constructed – Asante nationalism – denied their existence as a class and undermined the legitimacy of their own particular economic and political aspirations. The only way the *nkwankwaa* could have challenged Asante's ruling class and its usurpation of the Movement would have been to win the support of the dispossessed in a direct assault on the hegemony of the *Asantehene*. To do so would have meant challenging the very basis of their own nationalist ideology, and here lay the nub of their predicament. They were incapable of acting as a class; their fate was sealed. Never an officer corps, they were destined to remain the true and loyal foot soldiers of *Asante Kotoko*.

By 1956 Asante's political intelligentsia, backed by the *Asantehene* and the

⁴⁹ Despite the *Asantehene's* support for the Movement, he frequently let it be known that he distrusted the youngmen. On the occasion of the Asanteman Council's endorsement of the Movement, he rebuked the youngmen for the 'vilification, abuses and insults levelled against him ... when the Self-Government wave started'. He was outraged that the youngmen felt they could force him to come out with a statement in support of the Movement. This, he declared, 'showed disrespect. It was an insult, disgrace and shame'. See *Pioneer*, 22 October 1954. A year later, disturbed by what appeared to be a reign of the rabble on the streets of Kumase, he denounced those youngmen who had broken the law. He claimed that 'he felt sorry for those few Ashantis who would not understand the issues at stake ... for [whom] the ideas of good and right had no meaning. He decided that no ex-convict should have the privilege of shaking hands with him'. See Asanteman Council, *Minutes*, 28 October 1955.

chiefs of the Asanteman Council and the Kumase State Council, had successfully transformed the NLM from an extra-parliamentary movement – a popular front of resistance which embodied the diverse and often conflicting grievances of Asantes – into a proper parliamentary party. This party negotiated at length with the Colonial Office in London and competed in the 1956 general election, winning a majority of seats in Asante. However, it failed in its national electoral battle with the CPP, Nkrumah's party taking 71 of the 104 contested seats.

In August, 1956, not one *nkwankwaa* from among the group which launched the NLM took a seat in the parliament which led Ghana to independence. In that parliament, with the *Asantehene's* trustworthy supporters present, a compromise solution was worked out between the NLM and the CPP which entrenched the position of the chiefs in the constitution and gave some regional autonomy to Asante. The compromise may not have appeared as much of a victory for Asante in the battle with the CPP, but within Asante it marked a decisive victory for Asante's ruling class. Led by the *Asantehene*, they had succeeded, through constitutional means, in retaining their position – a position rooted in pre-colonial Asante and maintained through British colonial rule. It was a victory of continuity, tenacity and enduring hegemony.

The noted American historian, C. Vann Woodward, has remarked that counterfactual history 'liberates us from the tyranny of what actually did happen'.⁵⁰ It is useful here to explore one critical counterfactual question. What if Nkrumah had agreed to the earliest demands of Asante's youngmen for virtual autonomy for Asante? Clearly the terrain of struggle within Asante would have been much different. The fundamental social and economic contradictions between Asante's youngmen, the chiefs and the intelligentsia would have been brought into sharp relief as each group vied for control of an autonomous Asante. Indeed, by agreeing to the youngmen's demands, Nkrumah could have forced into the open the contest in Asante over the definition and control of that nation's self-determination – a contest heretofore distorted and overshadowed by the broader struggle against the CPP. In such a contest, the victory of Asante's ruling class was not inevitable. The formal demand for self-determination having been addressed, it could no longer shape the terrain of political struggle in Asante. Nkrumah would have unleashed upon Asante's ruling class those very youngmen and that very rabble who had transformed the Gold Coast's political struggle in 1948. Indeed, if Nkrumah had conceived of national liberation in terms broad enough to accommodate the demands of the NLM, perhaps the CPP would have found an effective 'ideological insert' into Asante, as Roger Murray describes it, and could have linked itself 'explicitly and concretely with poor farmers, floating agricultural proletariat and zongo dwellers *against* old and new privilege'.⁵¹ In such a scenario, perhaps Asante's *nkwankwaa* would have escaped their fate as loyal foot soldiers of the Golden Stool.

⁵⁰ C. V. Woodward, 'Comments on the panel, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow Revisited*', American Historical Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL (December 1986).

⁵¹ R. Murray, 'The Ghanaian road', *New Left Review*, xxxii (July/August 1963), 70.

But Nkrumah's conception of national liberation, though broad enough to encompass the entire African continent, was not broad enough to encompass the demand, within his own country, for self-determination in Asante. Thus, the social conflict within Asante has continued to take a back seat to Asante's broader struggle with the central government. The definition of Asante self-determination remains the definition offered by Asante's ruling class on the eve of independence and Asante nationalism remains the province of a ruling class which has consistently used it to foster its own privilege. Asante's youngmen, those who were the catalyst behind the 1954 resurrection of *Asante Kotoko*, remain locked in an historical limbo, prisoners of a nationalism so defined as to render them incapable of effectively challenging Asante's ruling class. Social and economic hegemony continues to be the preserve of those chiefs and political intellectuals who, since gaining control of the NLM, have held securely the reins of power in Asante. Those nameless, faceless men and women – the small-scale cocoa farmers, the *abusa* labourers and the urban workers whose militance and mass support made the NLM an imposing force – stand in foreboding stillness. They have not, as some predicted, been integrated into the modern civil state. They have been, quite simply, disarmed and silenced.

SUMMARY

This article examines the origins, background, composition and policies of the National Liberation Movement, a mass political organization founded in Asante in September, 1954. The central aim of the NLM was to advance Asante claims for self-determination and to oppose the CPP in their advocacy of a constitutional settlement with the British colonial government – a settlement that would bring about a unitary government in an independent Gold Coast [Ghana]. The analysis developed here places the 'youngmen' of Asante, the *nkwankwaa*, at the centre of these events. It is argued that this somewhat enigmatic group was the catalyst behind the formation of the NLM and the resurrection of Asante nationalism that it represented. The *nkwankwaa* forged a dynamic popular front of resistance in Asante to what they termed the 'black imperialism' of Nkrumah and the CPP. In exploring the pivotal role of the *nkwankwaa* in the rebirth and reconstruction of Asante nationalism, the discussion addresses the legacies of indirect rule in Asante, the importance of cocoa, the development of class, and the ambiguous role of Asante's political intelligentsia. Most crucially, it is suggested that the political development of the NLM turned upon the struggle within Asante between the *nkwankwaa* and the *Asantehene* (backed by the chiefs and Asante's political intelligentsia) over the very definition of 'nation' and of 'self-determination'. Thus, the article highlights the historical conflicts and contradictions within Asante society – contradictions which were softened by but not subsumed within Asante nationalism, and conflicts which were distorted, but not overshadowed, by the resilience of *Asante Kotoko* in the face of the centralized state. The reasons for the tenacity of Asante nationalism lay not in the struggle between Asante and what was to become the Ghanaian state, but in the unresolved struggles within Asante society.