

# Agency and Analogy in African History: the contribution of extra-mural studies in Ghana

Skinner, Katharine

DOI:  
[10.1353/hia.2007.0020](https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2007.0020)

## Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

## Citation for published version (Harvard):

Skinner, K 2007, 'Agency and Analogy in African History: the contribution of extra-mural studies in Ghana', *History in Africa*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 273-296. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2007.0020>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

## Publisher Rights Statement:

This article was published in: *History in Africa* Volume 34, 2007, pp. 273-296. DOI:10.1353/hia.2007.0020

## General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

## Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.



Project  
**MUSE**<sup>®</sup>

*Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.*

---

## **Agency and Analogy in African History: The Contribution of Extra-Mural Studies in Ghana<sup>1</sup>**

Skinner, Kate.

History in Africa, Volume 34, 2007, pp. 273-296 (Article)

Published by African Studies Association

DOI: 10.1353/hia.2007.0020

**History  
in  
Africa**

A JOURNAL OF METHOD



Published Annually by the  
AFRICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION  
Vol. 32 / 2006



For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/hia/summary/v034/34.1skinner.html>

# **AGENCY AND ANALOGY IN AFRICAN HISTORY: THE CONTRIBUTION OF EXTRA-MURAL STUDIES IN GHANA<sup>1</sup>**

**KATE SKINNER**  
**CWAS, UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM**

## **I**

As the pioneering generation of postwar British academics retired, some produced autobiographical texts which revealed the personal circumstances and intellectual influences that brought them to the study of Africa.<sup>2</sup> Edited volumes have also provided broader reflections on the academic disciplines, methodologies, and institutions through which these scholars engaged with the continent.<sup>3</sup> In one such text, Christopher Clapham and Richard Hodder-Williams noted the special relationship between extra-mural studies (also known as university adult education) and the academic study of Africa's mass nationalist movements:

The impetus for this study came to a remarkable degree from a tiny group of men and women who pioneered university extra-mural studies in the Gold Coast immediately after the [Second World War], and to a significant extent established the parameters for subse-

<sup>1</sup>This paper is part of a three-year research project funded by the Nuffield Foundation's New Career Development Scheme.

<sup>2</sup>Roland Oliver, *In the Realms of Gold: Pioneering in African History* (London, 1998), and "John Fage: a Personal Recollection," *JAH* 44(2003), 1-2; John Fage, "Reflections on the Genesis of Anglophone African History after World War II," *HA* 20(1993), 15-26; Antony Kirk-Greene, *The Emergence of African History at British Universities: an Autobiographical Approach* (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>3</sup>Douglas Rimmer and Antony Kirk-Greene, eds., *The British Intellectual Engagement with Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2000); Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, "Decolonising African History: Crises and Transitions in African Historiography, 1950-1990" (PhD., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2002).

quent study of the subject [African politics]. Gathered together under the aegis of Thomas Hodgkin [. . .], they were led by David Kimble [. . .], and included among the tutors Dennis Austin, Lalage Bown and Bill Tordoff, all of whom were to play a major role in African studies in the United Kingdom over the next forty years.<sup>4</sup>

These extra-mural tutors carried out their initial and most innovative research in the 1950s, “beyond the walls” of university campuses, where departments were only just beginning to consider Africa from any perspective other than that of European penetration. The research produced by extra-mural tutors bears the distinct imprint of their experience in the Gold Coast: for approximately a decade, they provided university adult education, in history, economics, and politics and government to self-selecting groups of literate Anglophone Africans in towns up and down the colony. While Clapham and Hodder-Williams have recognized the importance of extra-mural tutors’ research to the study of African politics, the extra-mural contribution has been somewhat overlooked in recent reviews of African history in the United Kingdom. This may be because, unlike Roland Oliver or John Fage, the extra-mural tutors were not typically among the very first lecturers or professors of British university departments specializing in the subject. However, the names Hodgkin, Kimble, Austin and Tordoff are just as familiar to students of Africa’s modern history as they are to students of African politics. Ivor Wilks—who is not mentioned by Clapham and Hodder-Williams—also began his academic career as an extra-mural tutor in the Gold Coast.

In this paper I will elaborate on the important but hitherto unexplored relationship between extra-mural studies and the ways in which we now study Africa’s modern history. Firstly, I will explain how and why extra-mural studies were introduced to the Gold Coast. After World War II, influential colonial advisors in the metropole regarded the economic and social situation of parts of tropical Africa as analogous to that of mid-nineteenth-century Britain. African nationalism was interpreted through references to British history, and, more specifically, through references to Chartism—the first national mass movement through which British workers demanded the franchise. For a short but significant period under the postwar Labour government, the initiatives and experiences of the British working class became an important model in the formulation of policies designed to guide Africa and its nationalist politicians to self-government. Adult education occupied a central place in British working-class history, and some influential policy-

<sup>4</sup>Christopher Clapham and Richard Hodder-Williams, “Africa and the Study of Politics” in Rimmer/Kirk-Greene, *British Intellectual Engagement*, 112.

makers and academics believed that this type of education could be transferred to the African colonies.

Secondly, I will discuss how this insistence on the comparability of nineteenth-century British working-class politics and twentieth-century African nationalism influenced the particular model of teaching and research that was introduced to the Gold Coast. This was vital in allowing extra-mural tutors to use their exceptional familiarity with the peoples and environments of the Gold Coast as a starting point for academic research. This familiarity opened up new sources and new interpretations, and tutors' research thus anticipated the debates about African agency which became much more explicit within university departments during the 1960s. Thirdly, I will point out that, although extra-mural tutors concentrated on political history, they also helped to establish the methodological practices and the evidential bases from which different types of social and cultural history could be written. Finally, I call for further historiographical research to investigate whether the extra-mural experiment in Africa also influenced historians of the British working-class.

## II

There are several studies of the introduction of extra-mural studies to Africa.<sup>5</sup> Most of these have been written by specialists whose primary concern has been to justify change or continuity in the content and delivery of university adult education; they have little to say about the role of extra-mural studies in the academic study of Africa's history. However, this body of work does provide a reliable narrative, which begins with the somewhat peculiar circumstances in which the Colonial Office cooperated in transplanting to tropical Africa a type of university adult education that was intended explicitly to prepare colonial subjects for self-government.

In 1943, the Colonial Office's Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies (ACEC) agreed a set of policy guidelines which prioritized the achievement of mass mother-tongue literacy in the African colonies.<sup>6</sup> While

<sup>5</sup>Kwa Hagan, *Oxford University and an Adult Education Experiment in Ghana, 1947-1950* (Legon, 1974); Abelwahid Aballa Yousif, *The Origins and Development of University Adult Education in Ghana and Nigeria, 1946-1966* (Bon-Bad Godesberg, 1974); Roger Fieldhouse, *Adult Education and the Cold War: Liberal Values under Siege, 1946-51* (Leeds, 1985); Colin Titmus and Tom Steele, *Adult Education for Independence: the Introduction of University Extra-Mural Work into British Tropical Africa* (Leeds, 1995); Albert Amedzro, "University-Based Adult Education in Ghana 1948-2000" in Kobina Asiedu, Kate Adoo-Adeku, and Albert Amedzro, eds., *The Practice of Adult Education in Ghana* (Accra, 2004).

<sup>6</sup>Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, *Mass Education in African Society* (London, 1943).

the ACEC suggested that government-led campaigns were the best means of achieving mass literacy, it also expressed an interest in voluntary associations as a means of promoting other forms of education that would prepare African adults for self-government:

We have only to look at the last hundred years in English history to see how powerful an incentive to mass education both the co-operatives and trade unions have proved to be. English experience shows too how wide a view they took of education, regarding it not only as literacy and improved technical skill but also as involving a new outlook in both local and central Government and on citizenship.<sup>7</sup>

The ACEC was confident that “the colonial peoples who have admired the stand made by the whole British people in war will want to learn from the adult education movement how a people can educate themselves to acquire a mature conception of citizenship.”<sup>8</sup> It also expressed a particular interest in what it termed the “progressive African Opinion” that was emerging from a variety of home-town improvement associations, literary societies, and debating clubs in the colonies.<sup>9</sup> These organizations were envisaged as a potential base from which to launch adult education initiatives, but the sub-committee was concerned that “as yet the number in many communities is small of individuals who have the leisure, and the sense of civic responsibility, which sustained voluntary work implies.”<sup>10</sup>

The Labour MP George Wigg was equally preoccupied by this perceived need to foster civic responsibility and service to the community when he visited West Africa in 1946. Wigg, who had served as district secretary of the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) in North Staffordshire, England, was surveying the possibilities for building on the army education that had proved so popular among African troops during World War II. He indicated to the Oxford University Extension Lectures Committee that “an enormous and vigorous field for work on extension courses lines is ready to be developed in larger centres of population in West Africa.” He argued that “[a] conception of education which did not lead to a job, but to unpaid service to the community will be something very new on the coast, but some day it must be started if self-government is not to remain a meaningless slogan.”<sup>11</sup> The historical relationship between the British Labour movement

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>11</sup>Rewley House, Oxford, Oxford University Extension Lectures Committee, Agendum 5, 9 March 1946. Also cited in Hagan, *Oxford University*, 4.

and extra-mural studies found further impetus when Arthur Creech Jones was appointed as Labour's Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1946. Creech Jones acted immediately on his longstanding personal interest in education for self-government, inviting Wigg onto a new sub-committee on "Education for Citizenship in Africa" which reported in 1948.<sup>12</sup>

This report argued that colonial policy must urgently focus on creating "an abundance of public-spirited citizens who are prepared to carry out all kinds of public duties merely from a sense of duty and loyalty to the community."<sup>13</sup> Citizenship was equated with "character."<sup>14</sup> Government's role in promoting citizenship was problematic because, according to the metropolitan model, citizens could not be trained through a straightforward transfer of knowledge and skills: "[t]he democratic habit of mind resembles religion—with which it has much in common—in that it cannot be taught merely from text-books."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, in Britain the very

demand for adult education was closely linked to the desire for social progress, and the initiative has come largely from the people themselves, particularly those who were most concerned to secure political and social reform, from the early trade unionists, co-operators and radicals of the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>16</sup>

Government could only facilitate the provision of adult education in the colonies; it could not create the demand.

Nonetheless, the sub-committee anticipated that voluntary organizations similar to the nineteenth-century British cooperatives, trade unions, and friendly societies would become more numerous, better organized and more influential in twentieth-century Africa, primarily because the underlying economic patterns (including urbanization) appeared to be similar: "[t]he economic development through which the Colonies are passing is not unlike that through which Britain passed a century or more ago."<sup>17</sup> Therefore,

<sup>12</sup>Colonial Office ACEC, *Education for Citizenship in Africa* (London, 1948). As chair of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, former vice-president of the Workers' Educational Association, and a participant in both the ACEC sub-committee on adult and mass education and the Elliot commission on higher education in West Africa, Creech Jones had a longstanding interest in the role of education in preparing Africans for self-government.

<sup>13</sup>Colonial Office ACEC, *Education for Citizenship in Africa*, quotes from pp. 9, 5, and 14 respectively.

<sup>14</sup>This argument is further developed in Kate Skinner, "Mass Education at the End of Empire: Training Citizens and Improving Villagers in the Late Colonial Gold Coast," unpublished ms.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

when Thomas Hodgkin, Secretary of the Oxford Delegacy for Extra-Mural Studies, contacted the Colonial Office in March 1946, his proposal that the delegacy should undertake some experimental courses in the urban centers of Nigeria and the Gold Coast was well-received.<sup>18</sup>

By 1948, however, there were signs that the Colonial Office regretted its earlier enthusiasm, and it resisted the Oxford Delegacy's attempts to extend the Gold Coast and Nigerian experiments into Sierra Leone. Historians of adult education have explained this change of heart in terms of the intensification of Cold War rivalries, the destabilizing effects of the riots that took place in the Gold Coast in 1948, and the discovery by Sir Christopher Cox (educational advisor to the Secretary of State and effectively head of the ACEC) that Hodgkin was a communist.<sup>19</sup> There was considerable anxiety about the potential of Hodgkin and extra-mural education to destabilize Gold Coast politics. No one anticipated, however, that Hodgkin would use extra-mural education to initiate historical research that would place Africans at the heart of African history, and represent Africans to the outside world as agents who were capable of shaping their past and their future.

### III

*The Times'* 1982 obituary described Thomas Hodgkin as having done "more than anyone to establish the serious study of African history" in the United Kingdom. Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia was more specific, and less hyperbolic, in identifying the importance of Hodgkin in making "the case for a more universalistic approach to the study of Africa" during the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> Hodgkin explicitly questioned the particularism of ethnography, and wrote that Africa must be studied not "as a thing in itself," nor as "the private preserve of *Africanistes*" but as part of other historical processes in the world.<sup>21</sup> No one has yet explored how far this insistence on the comparability, and indeed the relationships, of Africa with other continents, was grounded in the extra-mural experiment which first took Hodgkin to sub-Saharan Africa.

Hodgkin's daughter recently recalled with irony that the posthumous accolades could never have been predicted from Hodgkin's early career choices. In 1932 Hodgkin wrote to one of his former Oxford tutors that he

<sup>18</sup>National Archives, Kew, CO 554/135/2 Higher Education in West Africa, Study Courses Arranged by the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy, 1946, 1-6. Hodgkin was also able to quote back to the ACEC sections of the Asquith and Elliot commission reports which emphasized the benefits of including extra-mural departments in the new university institutions of West Africa.

<sup>19</sup>Fieldhouse, *Adult Education*, 55-56, 64-68; Titmus/Steele, *Adult Education*, 38-43.

<sup>20</sup>Brizuela-Garcia, "Decolonising African History," 84.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (London, 1956), 16.



was declining a colonial service post in the Gold Coast on the grounds that it was “a country with no past and no history—and no present either —only perhaps a promising future—and that at a Kindergarten level.”<sup>22</sup> It was Palestine, not Africa, which initially led Hodgkin to question British colonial policy. In 1936 he resigned from the Palestine Administrative Service in protest at British suppression of Arab nationalism in its League of Nations mandated territory.

By 1939 Hodgkin was acting as an Oxford extra-mural tutor in the WEA district of North Staffordshire, where George Wigg was serving as secretary. Here, Hodgkin, influenced by Leonard Barnes’ critiques of British colonial policy, produced his own WEA study outline for discussion of colonial issues with his adult students.<sup>23</sup> Following his appointment in 1945 as Secretary of the Oxford Delegacy for Extra-Mural Studies, Hodgkin was empowered to act on Wigg’s suggestions for university adult education in West Africa. He followed up Leonard Barnes’ contacts at the West African Students’ Union in London before making a preliminary tour of the Gold Coast and Nigeria in February and March 1947. Hodgkin was immediately fascinated by analogies between Gold Coast nationalists and various European reformers, radicals, and revolutionaries, and he continued to follow Gold Coast politics up to the elections of February 1951.

These elections, based on universal adult suffrage, returned a legislative assembly that was dominated by the African nationalist Convention People’s Party (CPP) and its leader Kwame Nkrumah. They represented a definite step towards internal self-government and indicated that the Gold Coast would be the first of Britain’s sub-Saharan colonies to achieve independence within the Commonwealth. Hodgkin’s election analysis was published in August 1951 by the Union of Democratic Control—of which Basil Davidson (journalist and future historian of Africa) was general secretary, and Leonard Barnes a member of the executive committee. Hodgkin argued that support for either the CPP or its older competitor, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), corresponded with the social and economic status of voters, with the CPP more attractive to the disadvantaged majority: “[t]hus the C.P.P., like the Chartists in Britain in the 1830s and 1840s, is primarily concerned with the establishment of democratic political institutions; but it regards this task as very much a ‘knife and fork question’.”<sup>24</sup>

Hodgkin was sharing in an interpretation of Chartism which regarded the mid-nineteenth-century political demands of the British working classes as

<sup>22</sup>Hodgkin/Wolfers, *Thomas Hodgkin*, vii-x. Hodgkin wrote this to F.F. Urquhart of Balliol College in 1932.

<sup>23</sup>Leonard Barnes, *Empire or Democracy? a Study of the Colonial Question* (London, 1939); Thomas Hodgkin, *The Colonial Empire: a Student’s guide* (London, 1942).

<sup>24</sup>Thomas Hodgkin, *Freedom for the Gold Coast?* (London, 1951), 8.

essentially instrumentalist: the vote was a means of resolving the socio-economic grievances that were both a necessary and sufficient precursor of class consciousness. G.D.H. Cole—who also published some of his work with the Union of Democratic Control—neatly summarized this interpretation in his 1941 study of Chartist leaders: “[h]unger and hatred — these were the forces that made Chartism a mass movement of the British working class.”<sup>25</sup> While Hodgkin insisted that the fundamental dynamics of African nationalism and Chartism were similar, he suggested that the CPP had given the Gold Coast a distinctive edge. It was unusual, he claimed, for the “left wing” to emerge so quickly as the dominant force in mass politics.

Following his resignation from the Communist Party in 1949 and the Oxford Delegacy in 1952, Hodgkin devoted himself to full-time research on Africa. The arguments that he sketched in 1951 were developed in his 1956 *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*. Hodgkin placed the CPP at a critical juncture within a three-part chronology of nationalism. He posited that the early twentieth century had seen the emergence of associations which were controlled by the most highly-educated Africans—the lawyers and professionals; in the interwar period emerged the youth movements, congresses, and leagues, which were still confined to urban and educated people and did not yet assume convincing leadership of popular economic protests such as cocoa hold-ups. Finally, after World War II the CPP introduced the organizational techniques which permitted the development of mass nationalism.<sup>26</sup> It was this third stage, the development of mass political movements, which was to occupy the extra-mural tutor Dennis Austin, whose first book Clapham and Hodder-Williams identified as a founding text in the study of African politics.

However, Hodgkin also urged further research into the economic and social history of the colonial urban centers that he considered the birthplaces of African nationalism:

Just as the Hammonds found it necessary, in order to account for the Chartist movement, to study in detail the state of the towns in the England of the 1840s, so, in order to account for contemporary African nationalism, I believe one must study the new “proto-industrial” towns—products of the economic revolution which Europe has brought to Africa. For it is above all in these new urban societies that the characteristic institutions and ideas of African nationalism are born and grow to maturity; and from these centres that they spread to, and influence “the bush”.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>G.D.H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits* (London, 1941), 1.

<sup>26</sup>Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (London, 1956), 141–44.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

Hodgkin further pointed out that within Gold Coast towns there was already a tradition of voluntary associations, which had

given an important minority valuable experience of modern forms of administration—the keeping of minutes and accounts, the handling of records and correspondence, the techniques of propaganda and diplomacy. In this way they have made it possible for the new urban leadership to acquire a kind of informal professional training—rather in the way that Nonconformist and working-class associations trained the new Labour leadership in nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>28</sup>

#### IV

David Kimble, in his fourteen-year period as head of extra-mural studies in the University College of the Gold Coast (University of Ghana after 1961), sought to understand the ways in which he and his colleagues could build on this tradition of voluntary associations. In order to understand this, however, he had first to fight for a model of university adult education which reserved a special place for innovative historical research.

In his negotiations with the Colonial Office, Hodgkin had to promise that Oxford Delegacy tutors would target a broad post-primary audience rather than prioritizing university standards during their three-month period of experimental lectures in 1947. And this they did. But it is unlikely that Hodgkin—or indeed others in the delegacy—would have been satisfied with continuing along these informal extension lecture lines. Back in Britain, the extension lecture model was associated with the last three decades of the nineteenth century, where academics were attempting to bring historical, economic, and political knowledge to large numbers of adult workers—many of whom were yet to be enfranchised.<sup>29</sup>

The tutorial class model, with its emphasis on sustained study aimed at university standards, was developed in the first decade of the twentieth century in order to provide more intensive education to the leaders of organized labor. The collective advancement of worker-students was given priority: examinations and certificates were deemed an impractical, unnecessary, and individualist distraction. The self-organization of students through the national voluntary Workers' Educational Association (WEA) was a key feature of the tutorial class model, and the high proportion of members of parliament who had worked their way from the WEA into the 1945 Labour

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>29</sup>Male workers were progressively enfranchised by Representation of the People Acts in 1832, 1867, 1884, and 1918. Females of varying socio-economic status were enfranchised by the Acts of 1918 and 1928.

government was deemed clear evidence of its success.<sup>30</sup> Hodgkin may have retained an additional, more personal, commitment to the tutorial class model because his maternal grandfather, A.L. Smith, was a member of the joint committee of Oxford and WEA representatives that had examined different models of worker education.

Although not of the same political allegiance or Oxford dynastic pedigree as Hodgkin, Kimble was also an enthusiastic advocate of the tutorial class and its emphasis on sustained study aimed at university standards.<sup>31</sup> Once he arrived in the Gold Coast on a two-year secondment from his Oxford Delegacy post, Kimble began to push for this model in the new department of extra-mural studies in the colony's university college. This decision may have been influenced by the circumstances in which Kimble arrived—the immediate aftermath of the 1948 riots in Accra and other Gold Coast towns. He was perhaps more realistic about the pace of nationalism than his critics would allow; certainly, he did not have three decades to enlighten large numbers of potential African voters through extension lectures, as universal suffrage was granted in advance of the February 1951 elections. As a result of those elections, African nationalists were playing a key role in government and anticipating the transfer of further powers in the run-up to independence in 1957. Kimble got on with organizing courses on parliamentary procedure and budgets for newly-elected legislators, and with advocating intensive education for leadership among a larger minority of literate Gold Coast Africans.

His attachment to the tutorial class model was not, as recent critics have implied, the result of an unreflective or imperialist faith in its superiority and universal applicability: it was merely a controversial position which he was required immediately to justify and defend.<sup>32</sup> This he did in August 1951, at an ACEC-initiated conference on adult education in the colonies, where debates over teaching models were explicitly linked to a historical research agenda. Kimble stressed that there was a pre-existing demand for higher level education among Africans:

It is important to remember that this was not something entirely new coming from outside, but simply a development from the kind of informal adult education that people in the Gold Coast were

<sup>30</sup>This summary of extra-mural models is based on Lawrence Goldman, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and Adult Education since 1850* (Oxford, 1995). On page 239 Goldman cites various estimates suggesting that 14 members of the 1945 Labour cabinet were tutors or members of the WEA, and that up to 100 Labour MPs were either current or former members, tutors, or students of the WEA.

<sup>31</sup>Titmus/Steele, *Adult Education*, 52-62.

<sup>32</sup>Titmus and Steele have been Kimble's most vociferous critics to date.

already providing for themselves. There were numerous literary and debating clubs, and such well known social clubs as the Eureka, Hodson and Rodger Clubs provided opportunities for lectures and educational meetings. There was the Youth Conference (before it became purely political) and a few serious, thinking groups, notably the Achimota Discussion Group. The hunger for education was sharpened by the effect of the war, after the return of many who had tasted travel abroad and Army education. It was not difficult to find groups eager for sustained study and discussion on important subjects.<sup>33</sup>

The People's Educational Association (PEA) in the Gold Coast, like the WEA in Britain, would be organizing existing demand, not creating from scratch a new demand for an entirely foreign product.

This first argument in favor of a particular educational model had deeper intellectual implications: Kimble was developing Hodgkin's initial observations about the active associational life in Gold Coast towns, and further insisting on comparability with the working-class associations of nineteenth-century Britain. He was aware that, for more than half a century before his own arrival on the Gold Coast, Africans had been forming voluntary associations which sought to unite the aims of individual and collective improvement by promoting greater understanding of the individual's social context and enhancing his (and sometimes her) ability to improve it. Kimble and Hodgkin saw in these associations an authentic African tradition of voluntary educational endeavor that was broadly consistent with the idealist philosophy that had first motivated extra-mural education in Britain.

Kimble believed that this tradition merited historical investigation because he followed Hodgkin's argument that it was the voluntary associations that had enabled Africans to learn the administrative, diplomatic, and financial techniques that were necessary conditions for the development of mass politics in future years. Kimble was awarded a University of London PhD and his work culminated in his publication in 1964 of *A Political History of Ghana: 1850-1928*, described by Clarendon Press as "the first full-scale history of the origins of nationalism in an African country."<sup>34</sup> This was not merely an academic project: Kimble's findings were also expounded in lectures to nationwide meetings of the PEA in the later 1950s, where aspiring African politicians were doubtless interested to learn of the efforts, limitations, and failures of earlier nationalists, and to locate themselves either within or outside of an older nationalist tradition.

<sup>33</sup>Colonial Office, *Record of the Conference on Adult Education in the Colonies held at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, August 17-24, 1951* (London, 1952), 17.

<sup>34</sup>David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana, 1850-1928* (Oxford, 1963).

At the same ACEC-initiated conference in 1951, Kimble tackled the arguments about how best to extend the benefits of education further down the social scale. He was well aware that the majority of rural Africans were not literate in English and could not benefit directly from extra-mural classes that aimed at a university standard. He believed, however, that extra-mural students would be able to translate knowledge into action for their less privileged compatriots only if they were studying subjects that had a direct relationship to their own experiences. Throughout the 1950s this objective was not fully compatible with studying for undergraduate degrees as the syllabi followed by the internal departments of the University College of the Gold Coast were still based on those of the University of London. At the latter institution, studies in the history, politics, and economies of Africa were only just beginning to develop beyond accounts of European penetration of the continent. Similar obstacles faced African students studying for O- and A-levels by correspondence with private British institutions such as Wolsey Hall.

Freedom from the demands of Eurocentric examinations and syllabi gave the extra-mural department a unique opportunity to open up new Africa-centered areas for teaching and research at the university level—a point largely unappreciated by Kimble's critics. Kimble thus informed the conference that "[w]e have already found that most academic subjects need completely re-thinking out in terms of local needs and problems; for example, Economics has to be taught in an agricultural rather than an industrial context."<sup>35</sup> In order to begin teaching on Gold Coast society, economy and history, the extra-mural department called upon existing experts—whether African or European—in the internal departments of the university college and elsewhere to make the results of their research accessible through a pamphlet series. The future politicians K.A. Busia and J.B. Danquah, along with assistant registrar of co-operatives Kwafo Apeadu, were participants in this early extra-mural effort to bring the tiny elite of African graduates into more frequent and extensive exchange with the larger minority of literate Anglophone Africans.<sup>36</sup>

Kimble did not stop at gathering teaching materials. He also saw the potential of the extra-mural class in conducting the primary research that was needed in order for university-based academics to write new kinds of books about Africa:

<sup>35</sup>Colonial Office, *Record of the Conference on Adult Education*, 18.

<sup>36</sup>K.A. Busia, *Education for Citizenship* (London, n.d.); J.B. Danquah, *Obligation in Akan Society* (London, n.d.); Kwafo Apeadu, *The Co-operative Movement* (London, n.d.). Copies available at Rhodes House, Oxford, Africana Collection, Lalage Bown Papers.

History, Economics and Politics tend to be among the most popular subjects in countries aiming at nationhood. History of the region has a special significance for peoples in rapid political and social transition, but it should be related to the wider field of world history. . . . while instilling a consciousness of national or tribal origins. . . . History should be broad enough to break down and not to accentuate parochial divisions. Students can play a part in collecting unwritten material but obviously a University must co-ordinate results.<sup>37</sup>

Kimble's view was based in his experience back in Britain, where it was a well-worn path for young and aspiring academics to "learn as you teach" by acting as extra-mural tutors. Such tuition was not purely a "stopgap" that preceded a more conventional academic career. As Lawrence Goldman has described it, the experience of extra-mural tuition had enabled certain tutors to reshape academic disciplines. In the early 1880s "the dons were rejecting orthodox economic theory and the workers were rejecting economic practice simultaneously. Together, they developed a critical tradition, based on certain canonized writers, texts, and ideas, that informed their understanding of society and politics."<sup>38</sup> In subsequent decades, R.H. Tawney, G.D.H. Cole, Asa Briggs, and E.P. Thompson all produced innovative research that was heavily influenced by their experience of university adult education among workers.

It is perhaps not surprising that the historic association between the study of workers' political movements and extra-mural education in the metropole should have been mirrored by a similar relationship between the study of nationalism and extra-mural education in the Gold Coast. Two of the most important historians of Chartism, Asa Briggs and G.D.H. Cole, were involved not only in the WEA but also in the International Federation of Workers' Educational Associations (IFWEA), of which the Gold Coast PEA was an associate member. The IFWEA sought to promote workers' education in developing countries and to ensure that workers' education (and not only mass literacy) would feature among the priorities of the new United Nations Educational and Scientific Council (UNESCO). In 1952 Cole served as Director of Studies at the first major postwar conference of the IFWEA, at which the Gold Coast was represented.<sup>39</sup>

In 1953 Asa Briggs undertook an inquiry into "Workers' Education for International Understanding" on behalf of UNESCO and the IFWEA.<sup>40</sup> He

<sup>37</sup>Colonial Office, *Record of the Conference on Adult Education*, 42-43.

<sup>38</sup>Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, 297.

<sup>39</sup>Nuffield College, Oxford, GDH Cole Papers, E2/4, E6/1-8 and E6/11.

<sup>40</sup><http://www.ifwea.org/ifweahistory.html#UNESCO>, accessed 11 May 2007.



also attended a PEA New Year School in the Gold Coast, and brought individual scholars who were based at the University College of the Gold Coast into his new volume of essays, *Chartist Studies*. This volume broke new ground in revealing the local context rather than the national manifestations of Chartism.<sup>41</sup> In 1954 the Kimbles hosted in the Gold Coast an Inter-African Seminar, which brought together workers' educational associations from across the continent in line with a recommendation of the 1953 UNESCO/IFWEA conference.<sup>42</sup>

David Kimble, then, was not wholly isolated either from scholars of Chartism or from changing interpretations of the antecedents and emergence of mass politics in Britain. He was less inclined than Hodgkin to draw explicit analogies between British and African political movements—indeed, he assiduously avoided the terminology of class, preferring instead S.F. Nadel's definition of elite.<sup>43</sup> But Kimble's volume on the early nationalists was intended as the first part of a longer study which would continue up to 1957 and would explain the emergence of mass politics. Ultimately, Kimble was concerned with the same questions that preoccupied historians of Chartism during the 1960s: why and how did social and economic grievances come to be expressed through demands that were specifically political? And how did Chartism/nationalism extend beyond the London labor aristocracy/the Gold Coast's urban elite and develop into a mass movement?

At one level Kimble noted that the political demands of the Gold Coast's urban elite were similar in nature to those that historians had identified for British workers: the franchise was perceived a means of resolving socio-economic grievances resulting from the legislative regulation of the economy in favor of a privileged minority. For the Gold Coast, Kimble described the desire of early African nationalists to remove the many professional and commercial restrictions that were based on racial discrimination. At another level, however, Kimble rejected socio-economic determinism in Gold Coast history: hardships and grievances were "environmental factors" that could not be assumed to lead "inevitably to the rise of nationalism." He concluded that the particular type of constitutional nationalism that he had identified in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Gold Coast was more specifically a response to "the superimposition of an external, centralized bureaucracy" and not a spontaneous force.<sup>44</sup>

In organizational terms, Kimble noted that the sporadic, reactive, and elitist nature of early nationalism was a far cry from the mass politics pio-

<sup>41</sup>Asa Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959). See in particular the chapter by Hugh Fearn, Assistant Registrar and Chaplain at the University of Ghana.

<sup>42</sup>David and Helen Kimble, *Adult Education in a Changing Africa: a Report on the Inter-African Seminar Held in the Gold Coast from December 10-23, 1954* (Legon, [1955?]).

<sup>43</sup>Kimble, *Political History of Ghana*, 136-41.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 556-57.



neered by Nkrumah after World War II. He insisted, nonetheless, that if nationalism was regarded “first and foremost as a state of mind, an act of consciousness,” it was possible to identify “the essential continuity of the nationalist tradition” in the century that preceded the 1957 grant of independence.<sup>45</sup> The African coastal elite were not, as the colonial stereotype would have it, deracinated or rendered “inauthentic” by literacy and western education. Rather, these people were interested in their history, and developed through extensive local research a historical view of themselves, their communities, and their evolving rights. It is difficult to know whether Kimble was influenced by Edward Thompson (or indeed vice-versa—more on this later), but his interpretation of Gold Coast nationalism had an emphasis similar to that of Thompson’s 1963 book on English popular radicalism: intellectual resources were as important as socio-economic grievance in enabling individuals to communicate widely and to take collective action.<sup>46</sup> Kimble’s work complemented that of three other extra-mural tutors in introducing a sense of African ideas and African agency to the political history of Ghana.

## V

Not all the expatriate tutors who were recruited to the Gold Coast extra-mural department began their careers with Hodgkin’s and Kimble’s sense of mission. Most of them did not envision a whole career in adult education—only one, Lalage Bown, followed this path.<sup>47</sup> Other tutors—particularly William Tordoff, Dennis Austin, and Ivor Wilks—had no prior association with extra-mural studies and, unlike Bown, they had not been trained by Hodgkin. They were loosely interested in academic careers in internal university departments, and had drafted doctoral research proposals that would be recognized as philosophy, politics, or economics. During the course of their extra-mural experience, however, they became aware of their privileged access to sources that had yet been untouched in reconstructions of Africa’s recent past.

Tordoff described his own path to the Gold Coast in the following way:

After three years in the army I went to Magdalene College, Cambridge. I thought about various careers . . . And then a job came up in extra-mural studies in the Gold Coast. I knew John Fage [who was then at the history department at the University College of the Gold

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 506-07, (quoting Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* [New York, 1945], 10, 15), and 554.

<sup>46</sup>E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1963).

<sup>47</sup>Interview with Lalage Bown, Shrewsbury, 12 July 2004.

Coast]. . . . So that was a bit of an incentive, somebody I knew. So I applied and got that job and went to Ghana in 1950. And we stayed there until 1962. So it was an exciting time to go because of the CPP, nationalism was at a height... Extra-mural studies before, I didn't really know anything very much about. . . . It was attractive to me while it was linked to the university. And the University College of the Gold Coast was affiliated to the University of London, so I was able to register for a PhD as an internal student.<sup>48</sup>

Tordoff spent three years as an extra-mural tutor in the Northern Territories and five years in the Ashanti Region, "in each case, travelling widely and so getting to know the people in a way that otherwise I never would have done," before settling into the economics and government department at Legon. Like other extra-mural tutors, he was invited to contribute to the periodical *West Africa*, and some of these pieces served as starting points for further research into the origins of contemporary controversies:

They were exciting days really in Ashanti, in 1954, and that was important to me, because it was a time when I basically knew a lot of the people who were quite close to and associated with the National Liberation Movement [the Ashanti nationalist movement which, from 1954-6 opposed Nkrumah's CPP and its plans for a unitary constitution] . . . the things I did with Dennis [Austin in an article in *Political Studies* on voting patterns in the Ashanti regional capital, Kumasi], and the Brong business [articles for *West Africa* on the Brong demand for their own region separate from Ashanti] . . . made me look back to past history [. . .] a lot of what happened, Ashanti nationalism, the strength of it, could only be understood if you looked back [. . .] So in other words the old was informing the new, I mean the more up-to-date stuff.<sup>49</sup>

It was this realization that led Tordoff to abandon his original plan to research the Gold Coast constitution from British documents. He began instead to analyze the changing power relations between the *Asantehene* (Ashanti kings) and their subordinate chiefs from the early period of colonization and resistance up to the machinations and negotiations through which the Ashanti confederacy was restored during the 1930s. Files in the

<sup>48</sup>Interview with William Tordoff, Chapel-en-le-Frith, 13 April 2004.

<sup>49</sup>*West Africa*, 25 June 1955, 2 July 1955, 9 July 1955, and 5 November 1955; Dennis Austin and William Tordoff, "Voting in an African Town," *Political Studies* 8/2(1960), 130-46.

Ghana National Archives at Kumasi attest to the difficulties that might otherwise have prevented Tordoff from completing his work. Senior colonial officers were well aware of the contemporary political implications of the historical material to which Tordoff requested access, and they found one reason after another to refuse him.<sup>50</sup> Through his extensive personal contacts, however, Tordoff was able to circumvent the more senior officials in order to gain access to the local material contained in district commissioners' record books and sometimes their files: "[w]hat you can certainly say is that being an extra-mural tutor, for me, facilitated my research enormously. Without that, I would never have been able to do it."<sup>51</sup>

In addition to these local-level colonial records, Tordoff's personal relationships with well-placed Africans gave him an awareness of (although not always full access to) records written by Ashantis. The extra-mural tutor in each region of the Gold Coast was assigned an "organiser" who worked with the PEA branches to coordinate classes, students, and programs. In the Ashanti Region, the organizer was William Boatin, whose father (*Kyidomhene* Kwame Boaten) had accompanied the *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I to the Seychelles in 1896 for a period of British-imposed exile. Through William Boatin, Tordoff learned of (but was not able to see) the contents of the diary kept by the exiled *Asantehene*. William Boatin's brother Paul served as private secretary to Agyeman Prempeh's successor, *Asantehene* Prempeh II, who lent his personal encouragement to extra-mural classes. Another important contact was I.K. Agyeman, who had served as a senior administrator in the royal palace under Prempeh II, and in the *Asante-man* Council of Chiefs. He, along with J.W.K. Appiah—who was also known to Tordoff—were among the founder-members of the Asante Kotoko Union Society which played a central role in Ashanti politics from 1916.<sup>52</sup>

Conversations with the Africans he met through extra-mural did more than simply flesh out details that were missing from the archival record. They influenced the very analysis on which Tordoff's book was based:

<sup>50</sup>Ghana National Archives, Kumasi, ARG 2/13/1/36, Extra-Mural Studies, Ghana University 1950-56, 83, letter from William Tordoff, Resident Tutor, Ashanti to J.A. Loveridge, Chief Regional Commissioner of Ashanti, 6 October 1954; and 84, Loveridge's response; 98, further request from Tordoff, 19 November 1954, and response 3 December 1954; 117-25, further request from Tordoff, 12 November 1955, and further refusal, 29 November 1955.

<sup>51</sup>Interview with William Tordoff, Chapel-en-le-Frith, 13 April 2004

<sup>52</sup>I am grateful to William Tordoff for elaborating on his friendships in the Ashanti Region and to Thomas McCaskie for explaining the backgrounds of the individuals listed in this paragraph.

I did have a lot of discussions with them, IK Agyeman and JWK Appiah . . . and what is vitally important, I think, for Ashanti, is to know the relationship of the Kumasi chiefs [those based in the political centre] to the outlying chiefs [those who had established their own states within the Ashanti empire]. . . . That's really... fundamental to the whole working of the structure. And they were very knowledgeable about that.

The results of his research, published in 1965 as *Ashanti under the Prempehs*, examined the ways in which Africans handled issues relating to the distribution of power in a large-scale kingdom.<sup>53</sup> Certainly, Tordoff was concerned with the British invasion and colonization of Ashanti, but this was no mere history of European penetration. Through access to local-level written and oral sources, he was able to trace the varying responses of Ashanti sub-groups and individuals to the British, to outline the questions that the British presence posed for relationships between Ashanti chiefs, and to identify the winners and losers in the restoration of the Ashanti confederacy.

In addition to analyzing center-periphery relations in Ashanti, Tordoff also considered how the influence of non-chiefly Ashantis was reduced during the re-establishment of the Ashanti confederacy under the British practice of Indirect Rule. Just as Kimble had noted the colonial and chiefly opposition to commoners' *asafo* companies, so Tordoff described the abolition of the office of *nkwankwaahene*—the commoners' spokesman—in Ashanti.<sup>54</sup> As Tordoff and his colleagues observed the nationalist agitation of the early 1950s, they attributed a particular salience to this older cleavage between chiefs/elders and commoners.

## VI

Dennis Austin's first book was published one year after Kimble's and one year before Tordoff's. *Politics in Ghana 1946-1960* was concerned with mass politics and decolonisation—the final period in Hodgkin's tripartite chronology of nationalism.<sup>55</sup> It is clear both from Austin's footnotes, and from the fact that he published some work jointly with Tordoff, that his analysis of Ghanaian politics was informed by the insights of his extramural colleagues. In particular, he borrowed from Wilks, Tordoff and, to a lesser extent Kimble, in making one of his most important opening arguments: the rapid expansion of elementary education in the interwar period

<sup>53</sup>William Tordoff, *Ashanti under the Prempehs 1888-1935* (London, 1965).

<sup>54</sup>Kimble, *Political History of Ghana*, 142, 418-19, 470-72; William Tordoff, "The Ashanti Confederacy," *JAH* 3(1962), 399-417.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

resulted in the formation in the postwar period of a distinctive cohort of discontented young men; but this discontent was salient precisely because the implementation of Indirect Rule had deprived these commoners of mechanisms by which their interests could be represented to chiefs and elders. This was the main impetus behind the political agitation of 1948-51, which Austin considered to be the first distinctive phase in mass nationalist politics.

In his private memoirs, Austin recorded his many debts to the Africans he met in the course of his extra-mural work, first in Ashanti and later in the Northern Territories. Like Tordoff, he was able to find out about the records of important political organisations: he persuaded Dr. J.B. Danquah to show him the minute book of the UGCC—the good lawyer even provided Austin with tea and cakes while he was reading the minutes. To gain access to the records of “a local party group in James Town Accra” (presumably the *Ga Shifimo Kpee*), Austin had to prove himself in a whiskey drinking contest.

Again like Tordoff, he learned as much in conversation as he did through documents. Austin was also hosted by William Boatin on his arrival in Kumasi. Through Boatin he was introduced to John and Nancy Tsiboe, Sam Arthur, and Kofi Dumoga (respectively proprietors, editor, and columnist of the *Ashanti Pioneer* newspaper). Bafuor Osei Akoto (the *Asantehene*’s chief linguist and the leader of the National Liberation Movement) was a personal friend. *Dormaaahene* Agyeman Badu, who played a key role in achieving Brong separation from Ashanti in the late 1950s, was a key informant. Drinking sessions at the Kumasi Hotel de Kingsway and the Accra Kalamazoo-Shake-Your-Head were a key element in Austin’s education in Gold Coast politics.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, however, the extra-mural classes that Austin conducted in the smaller towns of Ashanti and the Northern Territories provided him with a network of contacts that extended much further down the social scale to those who were neither chiefs nor university graduates. This network enabled Austin to follow both the regional opposition parties that emerged between 1951 and 1954, and the intricate relations between the CPP’s national executive and its constituency branches. His case study of the CPP in Bekwai, Ashanti was based almost entirely on information from students in his extra-mural class. His understanding of the Northern People’s Party was informed by gossip with extra-mural students in the Hollywood Bar, Bawku, and by his life-long friendship with Allen Lobaza of Paga, whom he met by chance at the side of the Achimota road.

Extra-mural certainly opened the door to a mine (and sometimes a mine-field) of information. But Austin’s analysis of this information was also

<sup>56</sup>Dennis Austin, private memoirs and correspondence with the author.

heavily influenced by his personal association with his extra-mural students: he sympathized deeply with those who were deprived of opportunities to further their formal education beyond the elementary level, and whose aspirations for white collar employment proved so difficult to fulfil in the contemporary economic context. The experiences and relationships forged through extra-mural education tended to make Austin, and indeed other tutors, suspicious of the new political science emanating from across the Atlantic. They wanted to write case studies that would put the real people and the real places that they knew so well onto the historical and political map. Participant observation was their primary research method, and they were suspicious of more theoretical works of political science that appeared to lack familiarity with the subjects of their research.

Helen Kimble recalled that excerpts from some founding texts of modernization theory were read aloud at dinner parties and greeted by howls of laughter and derision.<sup>57</sup> Austin later recalled that he was

. . . tempted into writing by reading, to my astonishment, an account of Gold Coast Politics by a young, intelligent American scholar, brimful of theories honed by the high priests of sociology; he wrote in a fashion which seemed to deny the ordinary use of English . . . Surely, I concluded, a political history and explanation of the events around us did not have to be like that. Why should I not try my hand?<sup>58</sup>

But Austin was also a shrewd operator: he played to his strengths, writing about what (and whom) he knew best. The central role of participant observation in his research produced attendant disadvantages. Austin's accounts of Ashanti and Northern politics, for example, are more detailed and more convincing than that of Ewe and Togoland politics (an area in which he never worked); women, who formed only a small minority among extra-mural students, are largely absent from his analysis. Despite these weaknesses, it is difficult to disagree with Clapham and Hodder-Williams' conclusion that as "an account of nationalism in all its complexity and diversity," *Politics in Ghana* has yet to be bettered.<sup>59</sup> The dense and rich insights into the political life of Gold Coasters have given Austin's work a longevity that has eluded his more theoretically-orientated contemporaries: with the passage of time his work has become a valuable historical narrative rather than a classic example of an outdated political theory.

<sup>57</sup>Interview with Helen Kimble, Oxford, 15 October 2003.

<sup>58</sup>Dennis Austin, private memoirs, 45.

<sup>59</sup>Clapham/Hodder-Williams, "Africa and the Study of Politics," 117.

## VII

In contrast to Austin and Tordoff, who focused on the twentieth century, Ivor Wilks' Africanist publications are all concerned with the precolonial period and would suggest that he was always a historian. In fact, Wilks arrived in the Gold Coast in 1953 on a temporary teaching contract in the philosophy department. From here he mailed home to the *Welsh Republican* a series of articles on the 1839 Chartist rising in South Wales, which he intended to use as a case study in an Oxford DPhil on the logic of interpretation (the other case study being that of the Roman withdrawal from Britain). Wilks, however, like many other young tutors, was asked if he would take on some additional teaching for the department of extra-mural studies. His first extra-mural classes were in Ada, where he became interested in local history, decided to change his doctoral topic accordingly, and sought the supervision of John Fage, who was then the head of the history department at Legon. Following Fage's departure for a lectureship in African history at the University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, Wilks began researching Akwamu history, wrote an MA thesis on this subject, and ultimately ended up finishing his PhD in Cambridge.<sup>60</sup>

Firstly, then, the extra-mural experience changed Wilks' disciplinary orientation. Secondly, it opened up new sources through which he could investigate Africa's past. After obtaining a resident tutor's post in the extra-mural department in 1955, Wilks spent three years in the Northern Territories, followed by three years in the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions. Initially, and like other tutors, his courses were in subjects such as "Political Theory and Institutions." These courses were in line with students' interest in matters that were directly relevant to the Gold Coast's position as an internally self-governing but not yet fully independent country. In one of Wilks' courses radical ideals of democracy were interrogated against a series of countries and periods (including ancient Greece, modern Britain, Switzerland, the USSR, and the United States) from which students were encouraged to seek practices that might be useful or transferable to the Gold Coast.

However, as the controversy over a federal or unitary constitution reached its height in 1956, Wilks was forced to move away from courses that were obviously political:

I started using this kind of syllabus in the Northern Territories. But by 1956 I could not do it any more. The classes would split into a CPP class and an NPP [Northern Peoples' Party] class. That's when I

<sup>60</sup>Interview with Ivor Wilks, Cribyn, Ceredigion, 30 September 2004.

became a historian. I got the students to interview their own grandmothers and that kind of thing. They loved it. [. . .] So I turned all the classes in the Northern Territories into local history, and I would provide some of the more general historical background.<sup>61</sup>

In 1958 Roland Oliver, then a lecturer in African history at the School of Oriental and African Studies and now credited along with John Fage as a “founding father” of the discipline of African history, visited Ghana and was struck by the significance of Wilks’ extra-mural work. In comparison to Wilks’ own rather modest summary of his “local history” classes, Oliver described in the *Manchester Guardian* how Wilks was teaching “difficult pioneer stuff far beyond the reach of any existing text book,” tracing “the medieval history of the states which lay along the southern fringes of the Sahara Desert and the possible influences which they might have sent southwards towards the northern parts of modern Ghana.” Oliver indicated that, as Wilks moved on through the histories of the Akwamu and Ashanti empires, he shared with his students his own primary research, and provided them with “a picture of the internal aspect of the African slave-trade, which teaches them much about state formation in West Africa a full two centuries before the period of European colonisation.”<sup>62</sup> Oliver also referred to the significance of Wilks’ extra-mural work in his autobiography written some forty years later.<sup>63</sup> This research and teaching, then, were at the heart of African history’s early concern with the precolonial kingdoms and empires which indicated so clearly to Eurocentric doubters that the dark continent did have something recognizable as “history.”

Moving from the Northern Territories to the Ashanti Region later in 1958, Wilks continued to avoid discussion of constitutions. His students began to collect oral histories—including stool histories (that is, histories of a particular chiefship) and biographies. A few years later, when he moved to the Institute of African Studies back at Legon, this interest grew into several significant projects. With Joseph Agyeman-Duah, Wilks conducted the Ashanti Stool Histories project; with al-Hajj Uthman b. Isaq Boyo he collected the Arabic manuscripts which had recorded oral chronicles from northern Ghana; and with Tom McCaskie and Phyllis Ferguson, he conducted the Asante Collective Biography projects.

In discussing the collection of oral history, Wilks recalled an incident in which he had infuriated *Asantehene* Prempeh II by interviewing his cook. The anecdote was amusing, but it points to what was distinctive about these

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Roland Oliver, “Pioneer Extra-Mural Studies in West Africa: Digging up Local History for the People,” *Manchester Guardian*, 7 February 1958.

<sup>63</sup>Oliver, *In the Realms of Gold*, 177.



projects: in addition to preserving and making more accessible the precious texts through which the most powerful groups and individuals recounted their history (and perhaps legitimated their contemporary positions), Wilks also began to enquire about the lives and interpretations of a much wider range of individuals whose ancestors were part of what became Ghana. Wilks' own magnum opus, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, is an empirical political history, but the biography and stool history projects on which he worked have provided some of the evidential basis for the cultural, social, and gendered histories that his graduate students, notably Tom McCaskie and Jean Allman, were to write in the 1990s.<sup>64</sup>

## VIII

The late 1960s witnessed a flowering of research at the University of Dar es Salaam which explicitly addressed the issue of agency in African history. As Brizuela-Garcia points out, Terence Ranger's inaugural lecture of March 1969 was an important statement: it helped to define a new research era and spelled out how Africanist scholars had begun to drive back the boundaries of their disciplines in order to recover "African initiative in Tanzanian history."<sup>65</sup> The innovative and experimental work that had been going on in the Gold Coast (and in Nigeria through the Ibadan school) was about to be mirrored by a similar effort in East African history. Ranger made the recovery of agency an explicit mission for the still young but now more confident discipline of African history. He also acknowledged that this concern with "agency" was not confined to Africanists; indeed he made a specific reference to Edward Thompson, whose *Making of the English Working Class* not only exemplified the initiative of apparently passive majorities, but also became a set text for Dar es Salaam's history students. Brizuela-Garcia was perceptive in pointing out what Ranger had to say about Thompson, who remains widely regarded as the principal advocate of "agency" in the writing of British history.

However, there remains a missing link. Thompson worked as an extra-mural lecturer at Leeds University. Historians of the British working classes are well aware of the influence of the extra-mural experience on Thompson's view of history. Echoing the patterns established by R.H. Tawney and G.D.H. Cole earlier in the twentieth century, Thompson informed the radi-

<sup>64</sup>Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975); T.C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante* (Cambridge, 1995); idem., *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African village, 1850-1950* (Edinburgh, 2000); Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, "I Will Not Eat Stone": a Women's History of Colonial Asante (Portsmouth NH, 2000).

<sup>65</sup>Ranger, T.O. *The Recovery of African Initiative in Tanzanian History* (Dar es Salaam, 1969), 3-4.

cal historians' group that he "went into adult education because it seemed to me to be an area in which I would learn something about industrial England, and would teach people who would teach me. Which they did."<sup>66</sup> Less widely acknowledged, however, is Thompson's interest in and contacts with West Africa. Among his colleagues at Leeds were Professor Sidney Raybould and Henry Collins—both of whom had worked in extra-mural studies in Nigeria. Later in his career, Thompson also published with the Africanist scholar (and fellow adult educationist) Jack Goody, and with Conor Cruise O'Brien (Chancellor of the University of Ghana from 1962 to 1965).<sup>67</sup>

Writing in 1963 of his desire to liberate working-class history from "Fabian orthodoxy" and from the search for "forerunners-pioneers of the Welfare State,"<sup>68</sup> Thompson added:

. . . we are not at the end of social evolution ourselves. In some of the lost causes of the people of the Industrial Revolution we may discover insights into social evils which we have yet to cure. Moreover, the greater part of the world today is still undergoing problems of industrialization, and of the formation of democratic institutions, analogous in many ways to our own experience during the Industrial Revolution. Causes which were lost in England might, in Asia or Africa, yet be won.<sup>69</sup>

In this paper I have sought to demonstrate the significance of analogies between British working-class movements and African nationalism in bringing extra-mural studies to the Gold Coast. I have also explained how extra-mural education provided a unique opportunity for tutors to embark on innovative research which explored the agency of Africans in Gold Coast history. The interest of scholars such as Cole, Briggs and Thompson in Africa suggests that the extra-mural traffic did not travel in one direction only: observations and perceptions of twentieth-century African nationalist movements may also have influenced historians' interpretations of political consciousness and mobilization among nineteenth-century British workers, and among other groups at other times. The field is open for further research.

<sup>66</sup>Henry Abelow et al, eds, *Visions of History: Interviews with E.P. Thompson* (New York, 1983).

<sup>67</sup>Jack Goody, Joan Thirsk, and E.P. Thompson, eds., *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800* (Cambridge, 1978); E.P. Thompson, "Disenchantment or Default: a Lay Sermon" in Conor Cruise O'Brien and W.D. Vaneech, eds., *Power and Consciousness* (New York, 1969).

<sup>68</sup>Thompson, *Making*, 11.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.