PROJECT MUSE®

Free People, Slaves and Pawns in the Western Gold Coast: The
Demography of Dependency in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century British
Archival Source

Perluigi Valsecchi

Ghana Studies, Volume 17, 2014, pp. 223-246 (Article)

Published by University of Wisconsin Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ghs.2014.0010>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/558363>

FREE PEOPLE, SLAVES AND PAWNS IN THE WESTERN GOLD COAST: THE DEMOGRAPHY OF DEPENDENCY IN A MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH ARCHIVAL SOURCE

Perluigi Valsecchi

In 1849, the Acting Governor and Judicial Assessor of the British settlements on the Gold Coast, James Coleman Fitzpatrick,¹ forwarded to the Colonial Office two tables providing an estimate, or rough census, of the population of Dixcove and Appolonia, two polities in the western Gold Coast, which, at the time, were under some form of British influence. The tables included details about territorial subdivisions, men, women, children and slaves and pawns (listed under the same headings). The document can be found in the Colonial Office papers, Original correspondence, in the National Archives of the United Kingdom.² Considering the

¹ James C. Fitzpatrick (1816-1880), an Irishman trained in law, was appointed as the Judicial Assessor in the Gold Coast from 1844 to 1853, and Chief Justice in 1853-54. He was acting Governor in 1849-50 and again in June-August 1853. A grudge against the extremely influential M. P. Matthew Forster (whose firm held a quasi-monopoly of British trade with the Gold Coast, and with whom Fitzpatrick contracted a debt on behalf of his brother) complicated his relationships with some leading British and African merchants of the Gold Coast (Swanzy 1962: 104, 106). In 1853 four important African merchants of Cape Coast petitioned for his removal from his position as Judicial Assessor (Kimble 1963: 106). Although the Colonial Office did not approve Acting-Governor Cruickshank's decision to suspend him, Fitzpatrick left the Gold Coast, to become, in 1861, a judge in the Cape Colony Supreme Court. He spent the rest of his life in South Africa, and was the father of the renowned South African politician and author Sir James Percy Fitzpatrick.

² TNA CO 96/15, enclosure in n° 28, Despatch of April 20, 1849, Acting Gov. Fitzpatrick to Earl Grey (Colonial Office), *Population of the Divisions of*

period and the area it deals with, the document is indeed a very rare, source both in terms of historical demography and the history of personal dependency and slavery in this section of the Gold Coast.

The table concerning Dixcove was quoted extensively in an article published in 1956 by Henry Swanzy in the “Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society”. Swanzy was writing about his family’s history and the citation of the data concerning Dixcove’s population served his own purpose of discussing the crucial role played by his ancestor Francis (Frank) Swanzy³ in that town (Swanzy 1956).

The background

Fitzpatrick’s tables cover the two sections of the Windward Coast (west of the British post at Sekondi), which had an alliance with the British, and over which the British claimed a form of “jurisdiction,” though it would be an exaggeration to describe it as coherent political control. Fitzpatrick’s attempt to take a census of Dixcove, and to make at least a rough estimate of the population of

Appolonia and Dixcove, enumerating the number of slaves and pawns. I tackled the two tables in a chapter of an Italian book edited by Fabio Viti (Valsecchi 2008).

³ Francis (Frank) Swanzy (1816-51) belonged to a family which had worked in the service of the Committee of African Merchants since 1789, when Frank’s father, James, had been sent to the Gold Coast as a surgeon. The Swanzy family played a prominent role in the history of the British Gold Coast. Frank spoke fluent Fanti and developed a profound knowledge of the local culture and customs. At the age of 18, he was the Commandant of Dixcove Fort. He lived in Dixcove as sole British trader and Magistrate. In 1839, he was elected a member of the Council of Merchants. He constituted with his brother Andrew the firm “F. & A, Swanzy Brothers” which became a leading merchant house in nineteenth century Gold Coast. In 1847, Frank married Catherine Dawson, the daughter of a former British Governor and an African woman. Catherine was the richest woman on the Gold Coast and an extremely influential person in Cape Coast. F. Swanzy was the main advocate of the two expeditions against King Kaku Aka of Appolonia, in 1835 and 1848. The king was a main hindrance to F. Swanzy’s commercial ambitions in the western Gold Coast. Frank died at sea in 1851 (Swanzy 1962).

Appolonia, was consistent with the proposal he articulated in his accompanying dispatch to the Colonial Office, i.e., to restructure the system of revenue raising for the Administration of the settlements by doing away with the cumbersome and inefficient system of customs duties (highly unpopular especially with the merchants), and instituting a poll tax levy.⁴

Dixcove, built around a natural harbor on the coast of Ahanta, was the main British station in the western Gold Coast, during this period. The town possessed a substantial fort that the English built in the 1690s. Political authority from Dixcove extended only a short distance along the coast, but covered much more substantial territory inland. The town was an autonomous polity, though its territory was entirely surrounded by the so-called Dutch Ahanta, a district over which the Dutch had established a sort of protectorate following a war against the king of Busua in 1837-38.⁵

Appolonia was an extensive polity running from the Ankobra River to the Tano River and Lagoons (in the areas currently crossed by the Ghana-Côte d'Ivoire frontier). In 1765, authorities in Appolonia had established an alliance with the British, who built a fort in the town of Beyin. However, from the fort at Cape Coast, prior to 1821 when they abandoned it, the British did not gain a position from which to exercise effective control over local rulers. King Kaku Aka (ca. 1832-1848) successfully acquired commercial and military power in the region. He exercised internal rule in full independence and maintained relations with major powers in the region: Asante, the Dutch, and the French, among others. In 1835, George Maclean tried to rein in Kaku Aka by entering his domains

⁴ TNA CO 96/15, Acting Gov. Fitzpatrick to Earl Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 20th April 1849. The poll tax was finally instituted in 1852.

⁵ The royal stool of Busua, which exercised an overlordship on most of Ahanta, had been temporarily suppressed following the capture and execution of Badu Bonsu, the King of Ahanta, in 1838. After proclaiming the area a "Protectorate", the Dutch tried with limited success to exercise direct jurisdiction over Ahanta, based on the intermediation of the chief of Butre.

with a show of military power to force him to sign a treaty of protection. The British, however, could not sustain occupation of Appolonia, so Maclean's tactics produced no lasting results with Kaku Aka, who continued to operate independent of British oversight and influence.

By 1847, Kaku Aka's aggressiveness had alienated all of his African and European neighbours, who openly demanded that British officials take action against him. In March and April 1848, Lt.-Governor William Winniett led a punitive expedition against Kaku Aka that included a coalition of forces from a number of polities in the Gold Coast. Kaku Aka was captured thanks to the defection of his main subordinates who surrendered him to the invaders. Coalition leaders tried him and imprisoned him in Cape Coast Castle. He died there on December 28, 1851.⁶ Despite their military success, the British did not permanently occupy Appolonia. After the capture of the king, leaders in Appolonia did not choose a successor to occupy the royal stool. The British mediated a power-sharing agreement among the main generals (*safohyenle*) of the deposed king,⁷ a policy that spelled the end of the strongest and most centralized polity of the littoral west of Elmina.

For the societies of the Gold Coast, the first half of the nineteenth century had been a time of dramatic economic and social transformation. The abolition and gradual suppression of the transatlantic slave trade⁸ resulted in important changes in the

⁶ TNA CO 96/15, Hill to Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 16th Feb. 1852. See also. Cruickshank 1853, 1: 202.

⁷ The provision created a weak form of power, affected by permanent instability, growing fragmentation, and internecine conflict. Open civil war burst out in 1869, leading to the formal split of the ex-kingdom into two separate polities - Eastern and Western Appolonia - in 1874 (for a reconstruction of these events, see Ackah 1965: chap. 3).

⁸ After the 1807 abolition, exports of slaves from the Gold Coast declined drastically, but illegal shipments continued nevertheless. Indeed, after 1815, the region actually experienced a limited resurgence in the trade (Lovejoy and Richardson 1995: 33-8). European documents record the illegal export of over

domestic labour market. The development of cash crop agriculture, boosted by the growth of “legitimate commerce” was just one aspect of a more general expansion of farming for local markets: primarily urban areas and ports. The result was an increased internal demand for slaves and generally bonded labour for employment in agriculture (Lovejoy and Richardson 1995: 32-56; Kea 1995: 119-43; Law 1995: 6-9). In the eighteenth century, the ruling military aristocracies exercised more or less total, direct control over the recruitment of bonded labour (through war, the justice system, and debt), its exploitation (in the military and on rulers’ estates, for example), and its exportation (as merchants in the transatlantic Slave Trade).

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the socio-demographic characteristics of slave owners markedly changed, as the expansion of agricultural production and commerce increased the purchasing power of social groups other than the military aristocracy, making bonded labour a highly requested – and to some extent affordable – investment for broader sections of society (Manning, 1985: 853; Adu-Boahen, 2010: 124-5). The internal market for slavery expanded, while the extension of credit mechanisms (linked also to the expansion of petty trade) led to a growth in human pawns. As far as the British residents were concerned, the laws designed to limit and discourage slave-holding by British subjects who resided on the coast were weak and ineffective.⁹ Virtually all British subjects in the country had

seven thousand slaves between 1815 and 1821 from western and eastern ports on the Gold Coast, especially from Axim and Accra (Reynolds 1974: 40-2). Shipments from the Gold Coast continued to take place periodically until at least 1839 (Eltis 1987: 168), in spite of British efforts at offshore naval patrolling. Slaves were also occasionally smuggled to ports east of the Volta, where European influence was weak. This went on until as late as 1842 (Reynolds 1974: 89). For up-to-date calculations of slave export numbers from the Gold Coast, see the slavevoyages.org database.

⁹ These measures were based on the Slave Trade Consolidation Act of 1824 and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. In 1841 Sir John Jeremie, Governor of Sierra

bonded labourers under their control, even, to some extent, the Wesleyan missionaries (Metcalf 1962: 311-13). Generally, British residents circumvented anti-slavery laws by entrusting their dependents of slave status to their African or Euro-African women and relations (Adu-Boahen, 2010: 128), and keeping direct control over individuals held in pawnship or other forms of bondage.

The official position against slavery and other forms of bonded status was reflected in the language Europeans employed with regard to these different types of personal dependency. On one hand, British officials and merchants generally avoided the term “slave” when referring to a Briton’s bonded dependents, but reserved it for bonded people held by Africans, Euro-Africans or Europeans of nationalities other than British.¹⁰ On the other hand, European and Euro-African residents tended to include slavery and pawnship within the same category of dependency. This was a product of two opposing historical trends: the weakening of fundamental distinctions between the two categories in the heydays of the slave trade,¹¹ and a diluted European perception of the typical features of slavery following abolition and anti-slavery legislation. In the eighteenth century those fundamental features were largely shared by Europeans and Africans, including aspects of severe constriction and violence, which were intrinsic to forms

Leone, issued a Proclamation forbidding any person to hold slaves within the British possessions in West Africa, Gold Coast included (Metcalf, 1962:258-9).

¹⁰ Dutch residents on the Gold Coast, for instance, were still allowed to hold slaves. Only between 1860 and 1863 did the Dutch Parliament abolish slavery in its own Dutch colonies and settlements. Dutch planters were, however, to be accorded a ‘transition period’ of ten years in order to achieve full emancipation. During this period the ex-slaves were not completely free (Emmer, *The Dutch*, pp. 127-8).

¹¹ For insightful remarks about the blurring of the distinction between pawns and slaves in the context of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade, see Law, 1994; Lovejoy and Richardson, 2001: *infra*, especially 75-6, 84, 88. For an 1819 case of attempted sale as a slave of a man who had been *panyarred* (captured as security for a debt contracted and left unpaid by one of his fellow-citizens), see Valsecchi, 2013.

of bonded status. In the nineteenth century post-abolition period, British residents who were still largely benefitting from control over bonded people tended to defuse accusations of slave-holding by portraying these forms of subjection as patently distinct from slavery. At the same time, some prominent European residents re-interpreted features of Gold Coast slavery--in which they were accused of taking part--by ambiguously extrapolating elements of integration and paternalism. Accordingly, they described local slavery--unlike American plantation slavery-- as fundamentally benign and inclusive, except for aspects of cruelty and abuse, which were imputed to the primitive state of African society in general, and not to the institution of slavery in itself. It was the formulation of a lasting Gold Coast "Domestic Slavery" paradigm.

"African domestic slavery" as an anthropological model is a twentieth-century invention, but it was characterized by a representation of relationships of dependency that had a much longer history, and a genealogy that is recognisable to those familiar with the writings of nineteenth-century Europeans and Euro-Africans who were fully integrated into the coastal society of the Gold Coast.¹² Brodie Cruickshank,¹³ a Briton who resided in

¹² For different perspectives in the interpretation of African forms of slavery and bonded status by prominent European residents, see Heaenger, 2000: 2-8. Heaenger discusses the analysis articulated by Brodie Cruickshank and the Basel missionary Johannes Zimmermann. In 1842 F. Swanzy provided a description of "the nature of slavery existing upon the coast" in BPP 1842 C551-I, *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on West Coast of Africa*, F. Swanzy, 29 April 1842 (Questions 531 to 536).

¹³ Brodie Cruickshank, a Scotsman, arrived in the Gold Coast in 1834, during George Maclean's term of office. He had a distinguished career as an administrator. He was the Commandant of Anomabo Fort (the second British post of importance after Cape Coast Castle) and Judicial Assessor. Cruickshank was also a prominent merchant, and for a long time the main agent of the trade firm Forster & Smith in the country. In 1853, he was appointed Acting Governor. He died in Lisbon in 1854, on his way back to Britain. Cruickshank is an outstanding source of information about the Gold Coast in the first half of the nineteenth century. In

the Gold Coast, provided the most authoritative early formulation of the “Domestic slavery” paradigm (indeed he made specific reference to the Fante region):

The condition of the slaves in the countries under our protection is by no means one of unmitigated hardship. In ordinary cases, the slave is considered as a member of his master's family, and often succeeds to his property, in default of a natural heir. He eats with him from the same dish and has an equal share in all his simple enjoyments. He intermarries with his children, and is allowed to acquire property of his own, over which, unless under very extraordinary circumstances, his master exercises no control. He sometimes even acquires wealth and consideration far superior to his master, who may occasionally be seen swelling his importance by following in his train. They address each other as ‘my father’ and ‘my son’, and differ in little in their relations from the respect and obedience implied in these endearing epithets (Cruikshank 1853, 2: 240).

Cruikshank was a seasoned resident in the country and part of a large network of local interests, alliances, and clientele. He had slaves and individuals held as security, in addition to accoutrements that accentuated a characteristic paternalistic idyll. One must not however dismiss his somewhat idyllic—and highly questionable—description of Gold Coast slavery as mere self-justification. Cruikshank's analysis of the relationship between slave and master reflects a theme that is well represented in accounts of local society. It illustrates a key element in the formulation of the historical discourse on West Africa where the language of kinship and alliance operated as a fundamental tool for inclusion and integration.

1853, he published a well-known two-volume account of the country, people, history, religion and politics under the title *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa*.

These dynamics counsel careful consideration of the context in which the two tables were allegedly produced. J. C. Fitzpatrick was the acting governor of the Gold Coast during Lt.-Governor W. Winniett's sick-leave in Britain from January 1849 to February 1850. In April 1849 he visited the British fort located in the town of Dixcove.. For many years the fort had been under the supervision of Frank Swanzy,¹⁴ whom the Colonial Office, against the advice of Cruickshank and other influential Gold Coast administrators, had preferred over Fitzpatrick for Judicial Assessor in 1844. The acting governor made unfavorable remarks to the Colonial Office about the state of British administration in Dixcove, pointing out abuses in the exercise of justice and creeping discontent among the local population (Swanzy 1962: 104). He implicitly blamed Frank Swanzy for the problems. From Dixcove, Fitzpatrick moved to Appolonia where he very effectively obtained the payment of part of the war reparations and fines that the British had imposed on the chiefs of Appolonia following the 1848 expedition. In the process, the acting governor repeatedly exercised severe physical constrictions on Ebanyenle, the main British ally in Appolonia and a close acquaintance of Swanzy, in order to induce him to hand over large quantities of gold dust. Ebanyenle,¹⁵ installed in 1848 as chief of the former royal capital of Atuabo, was tied up, beaten and severely

¹⁴ From 1847 Swanzy's preferred residence was Cape Coast. However, he still had massive interests, activities, & dependents in Dixcove (Swanzy 1962: 103-4).

¹⁵ Ebanyenle, was a former high ranking commander in Kaku Aka's forces who fell out of favor and took refuge in Axim. He joined the 1848 expedition, and played a crucial role in propitiating defections among Kaku Aka's forces. He was instrumental in the capture of the king, and was later installed as the chief of Atuabo, Kaku Aka's capital, and one of the two main rulers in the ex-kingdom. See Ackah 1965: 150-6; Cruickshank 1849: Atuambo, Appolonia, 28th april 1848; TNA CO 96/27, F. Swanzy, "Narrative of the Expedition to Appolonia, from Cape Coast Castle, in 1848 (from the 'M. S. Magazine' of May-June 1850)": 15.

humiliated in front of his subjects. Swanzy responded with a complaint to the Colonial Office in which he denounced the acting governor's abuses. However, the issue between Fitzpatrick and Ebanyenle worsened during the acting governor's visit to Atuabo to collect the remaining reparation money. The people of the town mounted an attack for which Fitzpatrick ordered the town set ablaze and Ebanyenle and four other chiefs arrested, taken to Cape Coast, lashed in public and condemned to forced labour. A serious case against Fitzpatrick was made in which Frank Swanzy was the main plaintiff. The two men had become sworn enemies.¹⁶

Fitzpatrick's animosity towards Swanzy is enshrined in his population table for Dixcove. The town and its territory are portrayed as a concentration of social relationships rooted in slavery, affecting a massive proportion of the population. Without any open declaration, Fitzpatrick points to Swanzy as the real mastermind of this system of dire subjection.

The state of documentary evidence does not detail how Fitzpatrick gathered his population figures about Dixcove and Appolonia. In the letter accompanying the statistical returns, he recognizes that his figures "are not of course strictly accurate," adding immediately "but I apprehend they are very nearly so as I took great pains in consulting persons of the greatest knowledge and experience in the two localities."¹⁷ Regrettably, he does not provide the names of his sources, fuelling the reader's doubt as to the reliability of the figures and urging the exercise of critical prudence in using them. Despite this limitation and the inherent prejudice against Swanzy evident in the data, these data do offer

¹⁶ TNA CO 96/23 N° 56, Bannerman to Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 13th July 1851 (with enclosures); N° 58, Swanzy to Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 14th July 1851 (with enclosures); PRAAD ADM 1/2/5, N° 70, Winniett to Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 21st August 1850; Encl. in N° 70, Fitzpatrick to Winniett, Cape Coast Castle, 13th August 1850.

¹⁷ TNA CO 96/15, Acting Gov. Fitzpatrick to Earl Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 20th April 1849.

some unique insights into the basic relationships of dependency in these two important sections of the Western Gold Coast.

Demography and personal dependency

The two tables list the main subdivisions: in the case of Dixcove, these are the quarters of the town along with their subordinate settlements in the countryside (the number of dependent villages – 32 – is provided in detail); in the case of Appolonia, it is the two royal residencies, Atuabo and Beyin, and the head-towns of the main territorial partitions of the country. Both tables show the name of the chief in charge of the subdivision, and the number of “houses” of each subdivision.¹⁸ The tables also include the number of men capable of bearing arms, the number of women of mature age, of children, of “pawns” and “slaves” gathered under the same heading, the number of free people, and finally the total number of inhabitants.

There is a noticeable difference in the degree of accuracy between the figures reported for Dixcove and those for Appolonia. The data for Dixcove are detailed to the very unit, while those reported for Appolonia are rough estimates rounded off to the nearest hundred. Indeed the British had the advantage of an incomparably higher degree of knowledge and control of the local situation in Dixcove than in the remote former kingdom of Appolonia, which they had invaded less than a year earlier, without having established any form of direct supervision whatever, let alone any real control.

¹⁸ In Fitzpatrick’s tables the word “house” appears to refer to the actual buildings occupied by a nuclear group headed by a male adult—which would make sense in the Nzema-Ahanta context: this is the first and most common use of the Nzema noun *sua* (house). In his accompanying letter Fitzpatrick remarks that the situation is different in the Fante country and the regions to the leeward of Cape Coast, where “there are what are called family houses in which large numbers reside” (TNA CO 96/15, Acting Gov. Fitzpatrick to Earl Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 20th April 1849).

Population
Divisions of Dixcove contain—

227

Divisions	Principal Men	Villages in Belonging to Division	Houses	Men capable of bearing arms	Women & Children of Males Capable	Children	Pawns & Slaves	Free	Entire Population
N ^o 1 Quakine Swah—	John Dadie—	0	140	270	350	00	350	350	700
N ^o 2 Bodo Quasie—	Boro Quasie—	9	131	230	300	100	100	530	630
N ^o 3 Anonuni—	Anonuni—	4	00	125	150	50	15	310	325
N ^o 4 Edder—	Edder Brab—	4	60	70	100	40	10	200	210
N ^o 5 Ntata Onwale—	Entah Onwale—	6	110	50	60	20	10	120	130
N ^o 6 Enketshie—	Enketshie—	-	30	75	56	30	141	20	161
N ^o 7 Swanzu Quaco—	Opaco—	1	50	600	150	50	660	40	700
Totals		32	601	* 1331	1161	370	1207	1570	2857

* From 6 to 800 more belonging to Opaco not included.

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE
Reference: CO 96 15
Reproduction may infringe copyright

Figure 1: Dixcove

Dixcove has a population of 2857 individuals:¹⁹ 1570 of the inhabitants are classified as “free”, and 1287 as “pawns or slaves,” i.e 45.04%. However, the footnote states that from 600 to 800 individuals are to be added to the Swanzu Kweku subdivision, raising the grand total to between 3457 and 3657. It appears that these were “men able to bear arms.” It is best to interpret Fitzpatrick’s footnote to suggest that there were additional “pawns and slaves.” Indeed he wrote in his letter to Lord Grey that “nearly two thirds of the population are slaves and pawns.”²⁰

¹⁹ In the case of Dixcove, the ratio between its 601 “houses”, the number of adult males and the total population would suggest that the “house” is a residential unit including different households connected on the basis of patrilineage or matrilineage.

²⁰ TNA CO 96/15, Acting Gov. Fitzpatrick to Earl Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 20th April 1849.

Population

Divisions of Appolonia contain

Divisions	Principal Men	Villages or Bush belonging to them	Men capable of bearing arms	Female of bearing arms	Children under 15	Slaves or Pawns	Free	Total Population
1. Mankor & Benin	Bayeno	Nil	300	1000	2000	1000	4000	4000
2. Lomi	Alaba	100	100	150	100	350	350	350
3. Nigugun	Eto	100	100	150	100	350	350	350
4. Ede Eru	Alisey	200	200	300	200	700	700	700
5. Oyo	Ede Eru	150	150	300	250	700	700	700
6. Beere	Alisey	400	400	600	300	1300	1300	1300
7. Oyo	Alisey	150	150	200	100	450	450	450
8. Oyo	Alisey	100	100	250	100	400	400	400
9. Asentah	Alisey	60	60	150	50	250	250	250
10. Asentah	Alisey	150	150	300	200	650	650	650
<i>Totals</i>			1710	2410	4400	2400	9160	9150

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE
Reference: 60 96 75
Reproduction may infringe copyright

Figure 2: Appolonia

In the Swanzy Kweku subdivision, 660 of the 1278 inhabitants are labeled as “pawns and slaves.” This subdivision, which was headed by the native merchant Richard Brace, was the location of the residence, stores, assets and staff of Frank Swanzy. The British trader and magistrate was a crucial node in the social and economic setup of Dixcove and its territory, and the apex of a hierarchy of patron-client relationships, which included a huge number of dependents, pawns and slaves whom he controlled directly or indirectly through his trade-partner and ally, Richard Brace. This is exactly what Fitzpatrick wanted to assert through his census table, namely to point to Frank Swanzy as the prototype of the European resident merchant who pays lip-service to emancipation and freedom while actually functioning as a stumbling block in the fight against unacceptable social habits and practices by fostering forms of personal and group subjection legally prohibited for British subjects (Swanzy 1956: 101).

Fitzpatrick's table on Dixcove suggests that "pawns and slaves" form between 45% and 55% of the total population, figures in line with the data we have for other parts of Atlantic West Africa of that day.

The Appolonia table tells a different story. To be precise, the document covers just a portion of the ex-kingdom, more or less the two capitals and the towns which headed the leading subdivisions of the army. They are all located on the littoral, with the exception of Nkroful (the birth-place of Kwame Nkrumah) and Adusuazo (or Edukrom). Curiously, some other important and well-known towns on the coast, such as Anokyi, Bonyere, Ezinlibo, Kabenlasuazo, etc. are not mentioned. It was only from 1857 that the British acquired some awareness of the demographic relevance of the towns in the interior of Appolonia, and only out of the need to extend the levy taxes. Fitzpatrick's calculation of 9160 inhabitants contradicts other reliable estimates, which place the population of Appolonia at over 20000, a figure more in keeping with later assessments.²¹ Fitzpatrick's figure of slightly over 9000 is

²¹ Fitzpatrick's estimate is close to the figure of 10 thousand inhabitants suggested in 1848 by Lt.-Governor William Winniett (TNA CO 96/13 n° 12, Winniett to Grey, Cape Coast castle, 22nd March 1848). According to the resident Commandant of the then British Fort of Appolonia (Beyin), J. Fountaine, the population was between 20 and 25 thousand in 1810 (TNA T.70/1590, "Questions proposed by H. M.'s Commissioners T. Ludlam and W. Dawes Esquires to J. Fountaine, Governor of Appolonia and his Answers thereto, J. Fountaine, Appolonia, 1st Sept. 1810"). In 1842 Francis Swanzy suggested a possible figure of 30 thousand (BPP 1842 C551-I, *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on West Coast of Africa*, F. Swanzy, 29 April 1842, Question 907), while the inhabitants of the kingdom of Appolonia were on the order of 15 thousand in 1847 according to Thévenard, the Commandant of the French post of Assinie (AN 200 MI 772 A.O.F. 5G5, Thévenard au Comm. De Gorée, Fort Janvier 5 nov. 1847. The Frenchman wrote that king Kaku Aka was in a position to set on foot around 6 thousand armed men). J. Fountaine's figure of 20-25 thousand is the only one coming from a direct and prolonged experience of residence and life in Appolonia, and one who had a more realistic perception of the portion of the population residing in the interior of the country. In 1857 Governor F. F. Bird discovered in the

more likely a very credible idea of the population of coastal Appolonia: the area which is called locally Anwianu - the name means literally “on the sand/beach (*anwia*)” -, and which is perceived as sharing a strong common identity in opposition to Namulenu (*namule*: farming settlement or area), the interior countryside surrounded by the forest.

Atuabo and Beyin, the two neighbouring royal residences, held 4,000 people (over 43% of the total population). The rate of “houses”/“men capable of bearing arms” was 1/1 in all towns with the exception of Atuabo and Beyin, where it grew exponentially to 300 houses against 1000 men. Likewise, the “mature females” were 150% of the men in all the subordinate towns, while their number rose to 200% of adult males in the two capitals.

Evidently, the populations of Atuabo and Beyin had a different composition compared with the rest of the country, comprised as it was of the king’s direct dependents: his family, his notable followers, and especially the members of the king’s *gyaase*, who guarded and attended to the royal residence.²²

Brodie Cruickshank provided some details of the dramatic turmoil that accompanied and followed the collapse of the old order. He described a wave of riots, vendettas and marauding that struck Kaku Aka’s family, his wives, friends, supporters, and dependents. (Cruickshank 1849: Atuambo, Appolonia, April 30th 1848). It is likely that a consequence of this disruption was a permanent exodus of some segments of the population. Others, such as dissidents and refugees of the *ancien régime* did eventually

course of his visit to Appolonia that a whole district of the interior, including ten large settlements, had been totally ignored in previous demographic assessments for the levy of the Poll tax (TNA CO 96/43 n°71, Act. Gov. Bird to E. Bulwer Lytton, Cape Coast Castle, Aug. 2nd 1858).

²² The *gyaase* of a ruler or office-holder was the body made up by all his, dependents servants and slaves. The members of the *gyaase* assumed various responsibilities for their royal master: they farmed his land, traded and fought for him, served in his house, granted him assistance in paying his debts, and on their death left him their assets.

return from exile.. Fitzpatrick listed the town of Baku, which had a population of 1,400, as the third largest settlement in Appolonia. It was the hometown and private residence of Ebanyenle, the fugitive ex-general of Kaku Aka, who the British had installed as the new ruler of Atuabo. However, the exact demographic changes that resulted from these developments remain unclear.

A striking detail from Fitzpatrick's table on Appolonia falls under the heading: "slaves and pawns." It has no figures, just a sentence stating "all free. The parents having a right to pawn their children." In this way, Fitzpatrick indicated that, in his view, at the time he made his estimate there were neither slaves nor pawns in the ex-kingdom of Appolonia. He was stating this about a section of the Gold Coast that in the past had been notorious in the British mind for the autocratic nature of its monarchical power and the peculiar situation where, according to an eighteenth-century European source, the whole population of the core of the kingdom was made up of personal slaves or direct dependents of the rulers.²³

The statement in Fitzpatrick's table was based on his assumption that the ancient hierarchy of personal dependency had been dismantled by the events of 1848, bringing about the king's removal and the virtual suspension of the monarchy of Appolonia. The acting governor's table was a statement to the effect that the end of the tyranny had resulted in the direct and immediate dissolution of all bonded status in the country: if all had been slaves of the king, his removal had set all slaves free. No more master, no more slaves.

While local power relationships had been shaken, they had not been totally subverted by the removal of their previous guarantor.

²³ TNA T70/1534, "Materials for Reporting upon the Public Account from primo Jan. 1770 to ultimo Dec. 1776: List of the Principal Kings, Cabboccers and others in the pay of the Committee, as they stood ultimo Dec. 1776". For a discussion of the hierarchy of dependency in eighteenth century Appolonia see Valsecchi, 2011: chap. 8).

This was indirectly substantiated in the population table by the sentence stating that rights which were inherent in structures of social leadership were still recognized: parents had the right to pawn their children, family-heads could pawn their fellow members, and chiefs could pawn their subjects. Thus the reproduction of forms of bonded status was assured. Slavery and pawnship, which Fitzpatrick proclaimed extinct in 1849, was soon restored by the new rulers, who built their own personal networks of slaves and pawns.²⁴

Fitzpatrick juxtaposed the massive presence of slavery and pawnship in Dixcove, Frank Swanzy's fief, to the new situation of Appolonia, where the elimination of the old tyranny *manu militari* had a liberating effect that could be consolidated through the support of responsible British officers with more enlightened views than Swanzy's, to extirpate such still deeply-rooted native customs as the right of families to reduce their fellow members into bonded status.

The two population tables are evidence of a perception and representation of slavery and dependency among Europeans and Euroafricans in mid-nineteenth century West Africa, well beyond the contingency of Fitzpatrick's dislike for the habits and practices of British Gold Coasters. "Intolerable" slavery, in the sense of a direct form of total control over the life of the enslaved persons, almost necessarily conducive to harshness and arbitrariness, and as such no longer accepted by British law, was associated with the presence of an independent native society and political power:

²⁴ Dutch sources of the 1860s—when Appolonia was a Dutch protectorate for a short time—provide interesting information on the subject. In 1870, in the context of the long Nzema civil war, individual chiefs and merchants of Appolonia were able to contribute a sizeable number of troops made up of unfree subjects. Nyameke Befeenza, a prominent office-holder and merchant of Beyin (well-known to the Europeans as Big Tom or Bikton), led an attack against Atuabo with a force made up of 100 of his own slaves and dependents. See FC N86 1870-1872, *Journal*, p. 34, *Journal Apollonia*, J. G. Schnerr, Feb. 11 1870 [ARA NBKG 642].

precisely what Appolonia had been like before the capture of its king. A milder, reformed, and to some extent “tolerable” native version of slavery might exist where native institutions were to some extent supervised and moderated by European presence and influence, as was the case in Dixcove and post-expedition Appolonia. The underlying assumption was that, wherever native institutions persisted as the basic framework of society, resident Europeans could not but accept a high degree of compromise with entrenched local habits and culture.

To return to our case, the bone of contention between Fitzpatrick on the one hand, and Frank Swanzy, Brodie Cruickshank, and other local merchants on the other, concerned the line between what was acceptable and what was unacceptable, between shared social languages and intrinsically incompatible ones, a line which was to be drawn through the extensive gray area created by an ancient history of African/European interaction on the Gold Coast.

Changing hierarchies of personal dependency

The decades following the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade witnessed accelerated changes in forms of subjection, such as slavery and pawnship. A new geography of personal dependence emerged within Gold Coast society, and basic social institutions were transformed by these developments, particularly family and residential patterns. The available data are fragmentary, and it is difficult to systematize them in a coherent picture. One may, however, attempt to outline a rough picture.

Compared to the eighteenth century, the mid-nineteenth century western Gold Coast was characterized by important differences in the modalities of settlement. The expansion of agriculture with the development of cash crops and increased

production of food crops²⁵ brought about a redistribution of the population from towns to permanent farming settlements in forest areas. This development was associated with rising challenges to established hierarchies, especially political ones. One of Frank Swanzy's statements before the 1842 Parliamentary Committee on the British bases along the West African Coast illustrates this process in the interior of Ahanta. All attempts by the British Magistrate court in Dixcove to provide arbitrations to African residents in the undefined area subject to the influence of the fort relied on the role of chiefs in enforcing the summonses issued by the Magistracy. Swanzy emphasized his notation that any effective exercise of British judiciary power or influence over any native individual could take place only "if he lives under one [chief]."²⁶ Swanzy's words do not refer only to cases of disputed authority, but rather to the fact that many individuals and communities were not under the real authority of any chief whatsoever.

In his statement, Swanzy alluded to the extensive forest areas of Dixcove, Ahanta and Wassa: a large "frontier" of expansion for gold-mining and new agricultural production,²⁷ including cash crops like palm oil and groundnuts, in which it was not just the uniqueness or prevalence of political powers that were called into question, but rather the efficacy of any exercise of authority by any

²⁵ In the specific case of Appolonia these decades witnessed a consistent expansion of rice farming. Fitzpatrick himself underlined the paramount importance of this production in the rural and commercial economy of the area (CO 96/15, Acting Gov. Fitzpatrick to Earl Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 20th April 1849)

²⁶ BPP 1842 C551-I, *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on West Coast of Africa, F. Swanzy, 29 April 1842 (Question 405)*. F. Swanzy also stated that local rulers have very circumscribed rights on the land, and are not recognized as "proprietors of the soil". By the way, those ownership rights by the chiefs do not extend to unoccupied land, and the access to uncultivated land is basically free (*Questions 475-478*).

²⁷ BPP 1842 C551-I, *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on West Coast of Africa, F. Swanzy, 29 April 1842 (Questions 468, 469, 1088, 1089, 1129, 1134)*.

power, whether African or European. Swanzy outlined what was a relatively recent relationship between Dixcove and the communities of its hinterland. This had certainly not been the case in the eighteenth century, when widespread insecurity and protracted conflict in the region had determined both a substantial concentration of the population in fortified settlements and a distinctive hold on society by political and military hierarchies.

A critical reading of our documents gives an impression of growing mobility within the social landscape of the Western Gold Coast, which led to substantial changes in the condition of the bonded sections of the population. Although the hierarchies of status and power of the previous century were still in place and the power balance within society had not really changed, social transformations extended from distinct processes, such as the effective contraction of the transatlantic slave trade, a marked reduction in warfare, improvement in general security, a moderate extension of European jurisdiction over some coastal areas, the growth of so-called “legitimate” commerce, and new agricultural developments. Indeed, these phenomena produced an “opening up” effect on the Gold Coast society, paving the way for remarkable changes in crucial aspects of local life and culture, such as those entailed by religious change and the expansion of Western education.

However, the first and most important aspect influenced by this “opening up” of society was the fundamental structure of the family. The lower social classes and marginal groups were increasingly successful in asserting forms of autonomy from the power of the military/commercial aristocracy. In the eighteenth century, the ruler’s household and allied groups--in a word the *gyaase* of rulers and big men--had very often constituted a large percentage of the total population in the main towns, but during the nineteenth century the population was less concentrated in and around the chiefs’ residences, with communities formed by slaves

and dependents tending to spread out to forest areas which they played a key role in colonizing. At the same time, this process contributed to radically reducing the direct hold and extraction capacity of rulers and big-men over large sections of the population of these areas, over which they had nominal control.

A crucial development was the substantial growth in the number of independent households, together with the increase in social relevance of matrilineages, different from the ruling ones. Such independent households and matrilineages were eager to augment their importance within the communities through acquisition of new members. These developments clearly favoured the integration and upward mobility of slaves, pawns, refugees, immigrants and, generally speaking, all, above all women. Dependents took part to an unprecedented degree in the efforts to build the new order, and in so doing they gained unprecedented rights to a share in its fruits.

These processes pervaded nineteenth century Gold Coast society, transforming the landscape of social relationships and setting the pace for radical social change decades ahead of the formal establishment of colonial rule. As far as the Gold Coast is concerned (not Asante, not the North), the forms of “domestic slavery” and pawnship which were eventually suppressed by colonial legislation, hastening the transition towards forms of wage labour, were already involved in local adaptive responses to the tumultuous changes of the early nineteenth century, which made those relationships a far cry from the slavery, panyarring²⁸ and

²⁸ The word indicates the seizing of one or more individuals as security for a debt contracted and left unpaid by a third party. As an established juridical institution, *panyarring* was based on the principle of corporate responsibility. The person (or persons) kidnapped – often the debtor himself – was taken as collateral by the creditor with the object of pressuring the debtor (or his or her family, village, town, or even the wider polity to which the debtor belonged) to repay the debt in order to obtain the release of the person kidnapped.

pawnship that had characterized Gold Coast society in the second half of the eighteenth century.

In conclusion, Fitzpatrick's population estimates say a lot about the thorny issue of bonded status and slavery among Europeans and Euroafricans in the mid-nineteenth-century Gold Coast. The "non-saids" in the two tables are even more meaningful than the many explicit declarations of crucial insights. The scant notations about the disproportionate number of "slaves and pawns" in the Swanzy Kweku subdivision of Dixcove and the gender ratio in Beyin and Atuabo--where everyone was ,in theory, free--outline a social institution which is the most effective agent for preserving and reproducing personal dependency. This institution is the *gyaase* of the leader: no matter if this leader is the king of Appolonia or the British magistrate of Dixcove.

Archival Sources and Abbreviations

AN, Archives Nationales, rue des Franc Bourgeois, Paris, France
 BPP, British Parliamentary Papers.
 FC, Furley Collection, Balme Library, Legon, Ghana.
 TNA, National Archives, Kew Gardens, UK.

References

- Ackah, James Y. 1965. *Kaku Ackah and the Split of Nzema*, M.A. thesis, University of Ghana, Legon.
- Adu-Boahen, Kwabena 2010. "Abolition, Economic Transition, Gender and Slavery: The Expansion of Women's Slaveholding in Ghana, 1807-1874". *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 31:1: 117-136.
- Austin, Gareth 1994. "Human Pawning in Asante, 1800-1950: Markets and Coercion, Gender and Cocoa." In T. Falola and P. Lovejoy (eds.), *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press: 119-159 (reprinted in Paul E. Lovejoy

and T. Falola eds. 2003. *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*. Trenton NJ: Africa World Press: 187-224).

_____. 2005. *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana. From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807-1956*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Cruikshank, Brodie. 1853 (1966). *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa* (2 vols.). London: Hurst and Blackett (Frank Cass & Co).

_____. 1849. *Letters from the Gold Coast and Slave Coast with an Account of a Mission to the King of Dahomey*. Unpublished manuscript, London, School of Oriental and African Studies.

Eltis, David 1987. *Economic growth and the ending of the transatlantic slave trade*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Haenger, Peter 2000. *Slaves and Slave Holders on the Gold Coast: Towards an Understanding of Social Bondage in West Africa*, Shaffer, J.J., Lovejoy, P.E., eds. Klosterberg: Schlettwein Publishing.

Kea, Ray A. 1995. "Plantations and labour in the south-east Gold Coast from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century." In R. Law (ed.), *From slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce. The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 119-43.

Law, Robin. 1995. "Introduction." in R. Law (ed.), *From slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce. The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1-31.

_____. 1994. "On pawning and enslavement for debt in the pre-colonial Slave Coast". In T. Falola and P. Lovejoy (eds.), *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press: 55-69 (reprinted in Paul E. Lovejoy and T. Falola eds. 2003. *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*. Trenton NJ: Africa World Press: 55-69).

- Lovejoy, Paul E. and Richardson, David 1995. "The initial 'crisis of adaptation': the impact of British abolition on the Atlantic Slave Trade in West Africa, 1808-1820." In R. Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate Commerce'. The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth Century West Africa*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 32-56.
- _____. 2001. "The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, c. 1600-1810". *Journal of African History*, 42: 67-89.
- Manning, Patrick 1985. "Contours of Slavery and Social Change in Africa." *American Historical Review* 88, no. 4, 5: 835-857.
- Metcalf, George E. 1962. *Maclean of the Gold Coast. The Life and Times of George Maclean, 1801-1847*. London-Ibadan-Accra: Oxford University Press.
- Reynolds, Edward 1974. *Trade and Economic Change on the Gold Coast, 1807-1874*. London, Longman.
- Swanzy, Henry. 1956. "A Trading Family in the Nineteenth Century Gold Coast." *Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society*, vol. II, part 2: 87-120.
- Valsecchi, Pierluigi. 2008. "Dipendenza e status personale in Africa occidentale (secolo XIX)." In Viti, Fabio (ed.), *Dipendenza personale, lavoro e politica*. Modena: edizioni Il Fiorino: 11-45.
- _____. 2011. *Power and State Formation in West Africa. Appollonia from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- _____. 2013. "How Kwadwo regained his freedom and put the slave traders in big trouble". In: A. Bellagamba, S. E. Greene, M. A. Klein. *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade. Volume 1: The Sources*. New York: Cambridge University Press: 67-282.