

A CENSORIOUS
ANALYSIS OF
GHANA'S
DECOLONIZATION
PROCESS

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Abstract:

It is evident that Ghana became the first state in sub-Saharan Africa to gain political independence from European colonial rule in 1957. Arguably, Ghana's decolonization did not involve military confrontation especially when compared with African countries such as Algeria and South Africa. Also, Kwame Nkrumah one of the Ghana's nationalists was a Pan-Africanist of the left wing. All these factors among others had attracted a lot of currency towards the study of the decolonization process of Ghana. Hence, this paper is set to examine Ghana's decolonization process.

Critically, this paper categorizes the decolonization process of Ghana into four stages: (1) the long tradition of anti-colonial protests (2) the post-WWII and the emergence of United Gold Coast Convention (3) the era of radicalism and the emergence of Convention People's Party (4) declaration of Self Government and Independence. Furthermore, this paper observes that Ghana's nationalism was unique because of its nationalistic flavour and orientation (Pan Africanist and Multiethnic in nature). In addition, this paper considers the roles played by agents of colonialism (Christian Mission & Education) in accentuating the process of decolonization of Ghana. Evidently, the Scripture of the Church influenced Nkrumah's political thoughts and sayings such as "***Seek you first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added to you***", a clear adaptation of Matthew 6:33.

Furthermore, this work argues the active roles played by women in the decolonization of Ghana which many works on decolonization of Ghana did not put into consideration. In conclusion, this paper explicitly summarized the general conditions and imperatives that favoured and catalysed the fast-tracked decolonization process of Ghana.

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INTRODUCTION

It is evident that Ghana became the first state in sub-Saharan Africa to gain political independence from European colonial rule in 1957. Arguably, Ghana's decolonization did not involve military confrontation especially when compared with African countries such as Algeria and South Africa. Also, Kwame Nkrumah one of the Ghana's nationalists was a Pan-Africanist of the left wing. All these factors among others had attracted a lot of currency towards the study of the decolonization process of Ghana. Hence, this paper is set to examine Ghana's decolonization process.

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CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL EXPLANATION

Conceptualization & Deconstruction of Decolonization: Strategic Withdrawal

This paper considers decolonization as an antithesis of colonization. Decolonization was, first and foremost, a process that ended in the transfer of power from Europeans to

Africans. This transfer did not favour the traditional elite, who were defeated by Europeans at the onset of colonialism. Instead the European rulers chose an entirely new elite, made up of those educated in Christian and secular institutions.

Decolonization varied from colony to colony. In some, it was swift and peaceful; in some, it was a protracted process that ended in violence. It is important to note that in West Africa, with the exception of Portuguese Guinea, decolonization was achieved through peaceful and constitutional processes. Arguably, one major reason for this was the absence of European settlers in the region, especially, when compared to other parts of Africa: Algeria, South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe. Another reason for the peaceful process was the non-strategic positioning of West Africa during the Cold War.

Also, Pan-Africanism greatly fuelled the Spirit of nationalism and decolonization in Africa. It became intensified after the Second World War, particularly with the Atlantic Charter and the 1948 Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights. A lot of other factors accentuated the process of decolonization. These include: the oppressive and brutal nature of colonial administration, the growth of educated elite, radicalization of the Press and concerted efforts of the Labour Unions, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, independence of India & the success of Asian and Arab nationalists, etc.

Fundamentally, through the method of decolonization, many European powers ensured that political independence was granted while they still held the key to economic control. This is what Kwame Nkrumah had described as neo-colonialism.

Fundamentally, the period between 1940 and 1960 is often called the age of decolonization in West Africa.

Women and the Ghana's Decolonization of Ghana

Studies of decolonization of Ghana seldom give evidence of any active participation by Ghanaian women. They tend to focus more on the activities of men, while the roles played Ghanaian women are, by and large, relegated to the background. Ghanaian women and African women at large played pivotal roles in the continent's nationalist struggles, in organizing anti-colonial activities, and in disseminating nationalist ideas.

Ghanaian women were proactive in organization of rural resistance, cultural nationalism, religious protests, labour movements and political protests.

Significantly, Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa of Asante mobilized the Asante regiments and led them into battle against the British, who had exiled King Prempeh I after the colonial conquest in 1900. She assembled almost fifty thousand Asante for a siege of Kumasi that lasted for two months. She is said to have spit on the British officer who arrested her. Though it was no march for British military power, Yaa Asantewaa's bravery remains an inspiration to Asante women and girls in articulating and forming synergy in process of decolonization of Ghana.

Deconstruction of Nationalism in West Africa & Ghana's Multiethnic Nationalism

Broadly speaking, scholars have identified two kinds of nationalism in West Africa. No doubt, both were present in each country to varying degrees and both contributed either positively or negatively to the pace and style of decolonization. Significantly, they also influenced the makeup and policies of postcolonial governments.

The first type was *ethnic nationalism*. No doubt, it was most notable in Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. Characteristically, political parties were formed on regional or tribal basis. William R. Bascom identifies this form of nationalism as *Tribal Nationalism*. William further argues that this form of nationalism hindered self-government, independence and national unity in most West African states.

The second type was the Multiethnic Nationalism typical of Ghana and Senegal. Characteristically, political associations and parties were established on a national outlook with a national mandate. Differences were often based on ideologies or principles rather than ethnic affiliation.

In Ghana, although the Akan-speaking group formed a slight majority in the population, an Akan nationalism did not develop to oppose the non-Akan. Evidently, the nationalist movement in Ghana under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah was typically manifested on a national outlook and continental orientation coloured with socialist paradigm.

The Church Mission, Education and the Decolonization of Ghana

Without any doubt, the Christian Mission played ignoble roles in colonialism. Indeed, an all sense of practicality, the Church was an agent of imperialism. Its doctrine preaches submission to the authority, in this case, to the British colonial government of the Gold Coast. The Church proudly proclaimed the "Civilizing Mission" of the Church and/or of the colonial power. Besides evangelizing the Gospel through the Bible, the Church also aggressively pursued education, thereby educating many people of the Gold Coast. Evidently, this policy of educating the people was an attempt to train some of the people that would served as clerks, messengers, etc in the British bureaucratic set-up in the colony.

However, binary tools of colonialism also served tools that provoked nationalism and increased the tempo of the process of decolonization of Ghana. Paul Gifford has aptly summarised the significant role of colonial Christian missions in the process towards independence by saying: "important in the creation of Ghana were the Protestant missions . . . and Ghana's history cannot be understood apart from the elite they created". These elite became the main actors in the political decolonisation process.

They also contributed to the decolonisation of missions by criticising the missionaries *inter alia*, for their superiority thinking notwithstanding the two shameful world wars, and by rejecting the wholesale imposition of the Western culture in the name of Christianity.

The thinking and structural aspects of the decolonisation process within the official church did follow mutatis mutandis the decolonisation thinking and practice of the colonial government. It is therefore not surprising that not until 1949, when the colonial government had, in principle, accepted the demands of the nationalists; we come across a public statement issued by the Christian Council on "Christianity and Political Development", which inter alia outlined the right to self-government, and the relationship between church and political parties. When we look at individual Christians, the church was very much involved in the nationalist movement.

David Kimble, in his extensive study on the rise of Gold Coast nationalism, rightly stated that "the nationalist movement could hardly have got under way had it not been for the remarkable work of the Missions in the field of education". That there was hardly any Catholic of stature and influence who got involved in the pre-independence struggle, apart from Kwame Nkrumah, has been recently explained as due to the fact that Catholic missions did not provide higher (secondary) education before the late 1930s, while the Protestant missions had done so much earlier. The Christian missions provided many services to the people, which were a contribution to the foundation of independent Ghana.

Fundamentally, the Church and the instrumentality of its education policy unexpectedly aided Ghana's decolonization. Nearly all the main leaders of the successive nationalist movements were Christians who had received their formation with Christian influence from Protestant mission schools. The influence of the instrumentality of the Church Mission and education became epitomised in Kwame Nkrumah. Evidently, the Scripture of the Church influenced Nkrumah's political thoughts and sayings such as "***Seek you first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added to you***", a clear adaptation of Matthew 6:33.

Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) who, as a boy, had been baptised into the Catholic Church, now declared: "***Today, I am a non-denominational Christian and a Marxist socialist, and I have not found any contradiction between the two***". Precisely, it was his Marxist leanings that worried the Church leaders and they became even more worried when Nkrumah's followers started to extol the CPP by applying to it the Beatitudes, and, later on, by applying to Nkrumah titles like *Osagyefo* (Saviour) and *Asomdwehene* (Prince of Peace), a clear reference to Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah.

LONG TRADITION OF ANTI-COLONIAL PROTESTS: EARLY NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS

Organized opposition to British policies took place from the early days of colonial administration. In 1852 coastal chiefs protested the imposition of a poll tax, and in 1868 a confederation of Fante states contested British interference in their local affairs. In an effort to protect the erosion of their traditional rights, the chiefs adopted a constitution in 1871 that was to regulate relations with the British administration. The British reacted by arresting several of the chiefs.

Most Gold Coast nationalist leaders were educated Africans. An organization called the ***Aborigines' Rights Protection Society*** was formed in the 1890s to oppose land bills that threatened traditional land tenure. In the early 20th century, nationalists challenged the arbitrary nature of the colonial political system, which placed unlimited power in the hands of the governor and his appointed Legislative Council.

In 1920 ***Joseph E. Casely-Hayford***, a prominent Gold Coast lawyer and nationalist, organized the *National Congress of British West Africa*. This body of educated persons from Britain's various West African colonies sent a delegation to the British Colonial Office in London to argue that a colony's administration should be elected by its subjects. The British government, however, preferred to practice indirect rule, relying on a colony's traditional chiefs for local administration at the exclusion of educated people. In their various newspapers and at conferences, these early nationalists nevertheless continued to urge the colonial government to initiate administrative changes.

POST WWII & THE EMERGENCE OF THE UNITED GOLD COAST CONVENTION

Demands on the colonial government intensified after World War II (1939-1945). In 1946 Governor Alan Burns responded by announcing radical constitutional changes that made it possible for a majority African Legislative Council to be elected. Executive power was to remain in the hands of the governor, to whom the legislative council reported. Even so, the 1946 constitution provided the people of the Gold Coast with a higher degree of political power than anywhere else in colonial Africa. The changes also showed nationalist leaders that their voices were being heard.

Regardless of their shortcomings, concerted efforts to resist colonialism in Ghana were considerably effective in the sense that the attention of the colonial administrators was grabbed to the imperatives of the grievances of the people. Thus, the World War II greatly contributed to the increase in demand for reforms and the outright independence. It is evident that the war burst the bubble. A scholar indeed argues that Hitler's enforcement of the superiority of the Aryan race in Europe and the world at large helped in accentuating the quest for freedom all over the world.

Significantly, in West Africa particularly after the World War II there was increased evolution of concerted political activities and growth of political parties. Founded in 1947, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was the first nationwide political party in Ghana to call for self-government. Its leading members included the respected lawyer Joseph B. Danquah and the American-educated socialist Kwame Nkrumah. The aim of the UGCC was encapsulated as "self-government within the shortest possible time."

The UGCC drew support from educated Ghanaians, most of whom were either urban professionals or traditional chiefs. Economic dissatisfaction among the Gold Coast's Africans, especially those who had served in World War II, resulted in nationwide rioting in 1948. The colonial administration accused the nationalist leaders of inciting the disturbances and arrested Nkrumah and several others. This only served to make Nkrumah a more popular figure and fuelled the call for self-rule.

No doubt, many imperatives and grievances aided the popularity and currency of the UGCC. These include (a) the order by the British colonial administrators that the farmers cut down cocoa trees that were certified as diseased. This bred disaffection among the Gold Coast farmers whose major economic activities was cocoa farming (b) the high price of imported consumer goods, against which a boycott was organized in 1948 (c) the fact that the ex-servicemen became unemployed since their return from WWII. This provoked a protest march against the government in 1948.

Thus, the UGCC was considered by the people as a strong party to galvanize the concerted efforts of the pained people of the Gold Coast in leading the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, tyranny and foreign absurdity.

Consequently, rioting, looting and destruction became widespread in the colony and the colonial government blamed the UGCC for all the disturbances. Hence, Dr J.B. Danquah and five others were arrested and jailed.

RADICALISM & CONVENTION PEOPLE'S PARTY

Viewing Danquah and other UGCC leaders as too conservative in their efforts to win independence, Nkrumah split with the UGCC later in 1949 and formed his own Convention People's Party (CPP). Other leaders of CPP were K.A. Gbademah and Kojo Botso.

The first objective the party pursued towards the realization of the ultimate goal of "self-government now" was coined **POSITIVE ACTION**. Hence, this was a non-violent form of resistance characterized by general strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations.

Nkrumah's watchword was "Independence Now"—an uncompromising policy that appealed to many. The CPP drew populist support from rural and working class Ghanaians, further distancing it from the more elite UGCC. In 1950 Nkrumah announced his "Positive Action" campaign, which consisted of a boycott of foreign business, noncooperation with the government, and a general workers' strike. Public services were disrupted, and when rioting occurred Nkrumah and some CPP leaders were again arrested and imprisoned for sedition.

REFORMS, CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS, SELF GOVERNMENT AND INDEPENDENCE

A new constitution was adopted in 1951, replacing the Legislative Council with a Legislative Assembly, designed to provide rural Africans greater representation. In the 1951 elections, the CPP won a majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly. Colonial governor Sir Charles Arden-Clarke released Nkrumah from prison and appointed him leader of government business. Nkrumah and Arden-Clarke transformed the colonial government into a parliamentary system, and in 1952 Nkrumah was elected to the newly created office of prime minister. The UGCC and several regional-based parties—including the Ashanti-dominated National Liberation Movement and the Northern People's Party—comprised the political opposition to Nkrumah and the CPP. These groups opposed the new governmental structure, advocating a federalist system.

In June 1953, the CPP continued its nationalist agitation by submitting a set of proposals for a new constitution to the assembly.

The 1953 proposals led to the 1954 constitution which provided for an unofficial all-African cabinet. In the election following from the constitution's introduction, CPP won 79 out of 104 seats. This, thus, paved the way for *internal self-government in 1954*.

In 1956, the CPP tabled a motion calling for independence. This was markedly passed by the assembly and accepted by the British colonial government.

Following intense constitutional negotiations and a hotly contested election, the CPP emerged on March 6, 1957, to lead the government of an independent Ghana. Nkrumah became the country's first prime minister. The UGCC and several other opposition parties joined together to form the United Party (UP).

CONCLUSION

Fundamentally, many imperatives triggered the decolonization of Ghana. These include: the long tradition of anti-colonial protests; the relative economic prosperity of the country (gold, cocoa, and other raw materials); absence of ethnic nationalism; etc.

This work by Group II of HIS 406 Class of 2011/2012 has been able to identify among other things four stages of the Ghana's decolonization, the roles played by agents of colonialism (Christian Mission & Education) in accentuating the process decolonization of Ghana, and the uniqueness of Ghana's nationalism.

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