The Issue of Unity: Pan-Africanism and the Tribal Phenomenon of the Gold Coast

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Abstract :

The Scramble for Africa (1884-1914), was the meeting in which major European countries took territory and power from existing African people by dividing the continent according to their own interests, here by, neglecting its inhabitants with all their similarities or even differences. Even worse, these colonial powers intensified this division further when they adopted the 'divide and rule' policy: it is with this phase that tribalism was created and deep-seated within the already living African communities. This indigenous political division offered a difficult and deeply-rooted obstacle to overcome by the late anti-colonial national attempts. However, there occurred this movement, Pan-Africanism, which promoted unity and fought for all African people founded upon their identical colonial experience of suffering injustice, discrimination, oppression and domination. Because they are tribally tied, Pan-Africanism came to show these African tribes how much they should be connected to their ancestral land, Africa, and how they should unite their efforts to set it free from the hands of colonialism. Therefore, the focus of this research paper is the emerging Pan-African ideas of unity in the Gold Coast and the way the divided tribal and ethnic groups, existing in the area, reacted to this unifying force. The study employed a case study, the Gold Coast, research design. Moreover, the research used both primary and secondary data collection methods. Data was collected using content analysis which involves reviewing literature relevant to Pan-Africanism and tribalism in the Gold Coast. Indeed, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana(a new name for the Gold Coast), succeed in reversing this divisive force of tribalism into a source of strength and unity through the use of these tribes' common bonds of language and tradition against colonial rule by which he granted his country independence in 1957.

Keywords: African people; 'divide and rule' policy; tribalism; Pan-Africanism; unity; the Gold Coast, Kwame Nkrumah.

Introduction:

The African continent has been always considered as the arena for European powers in which they unconditionally exploited the different territories' wealth. One apparent symbol of this exploitation was the Berlin Conference 1884, known also by the Scramble for Africa, in which European powers were gathered together as they started subdividing the continent among themselves. This deed deeply affected Africa and its inhabitants.

Furthermore, the creation of colonial boundaries between the existing African people created disorder and chaos as they already had their own communal societies. In fact, the most important consequence of this subdivision was tribalism. The latter can be viewed both as a negative and a positive force for unification.

In this regard, this study aims at showing the positive side of tribalism and how it can promote solidarity and peaceful coexistence among different tribes. The role of Kwame Nkrumah's Gold Coast is taken for the one reason that it was the first country that granted independence and showed signs of tribal uniformity and homogeneousness.

There were various occupations, through different periods of time, from different groupings to the area of the Gold Coast, yet this study is focusing on the major tribes that settled within the area and had an immense effect on its history of events towards independence: the Ashanti, the Fante, and the Northern Territories tribes.

1. The Gold Coast: a Background

State before Independence	British colony(1821-1957)
Type of Government	Constitutional monarchy
State during Colonialism	- Colony established 1821 - Final Combination of local tribes 1901 - Addition of British Togoland 1956
Independence	Ghana,6 March 1957
Capital	Cape Coast (1821-1877) Accra (1877-1957)
Languages	English(formal), local languages
Currency	British pound, Cedi(1965 onwards)

TableN°1: General information about the Gold Coast

Gegraphically speaking, the Gold Coast was a british colony situated in the Gulf of Guinea, West of Africa. In fact, large amounts of gold were found in the area thereby the term 'gold' was coind by the Europeans to distiguish this rich coastal region from its surroundings.

Historically, the first Europeans to contact with the Gold Coast inhabitants were the Portuguese 1471 who came and seized the area's riches:gold, knives, beads, rum, cocoa and other resources. However, the most prominent trade of this territory was that of human resources(slaves). Later, there occurred the British forces who maintained their control over the territory,1821, exploiting the colony's revenues with no limits.(Apter.1955:30) Notably, as Uzoigwe 1985 mentions that most European powers adopted the 'treaty making method' in which the more treaties you make with the local inhabitants(chiefs) of the area the more influence you will practice on the region:

> Prior to the Berlin Act, European powers had acquired spheres of influence in Africa in a variety of ways—through settlement, exploration, the establishment of commercial posts, missionary settlements, the occupation of strategic areas, and by making treaties with African rulers. Following the conference, influence by means of treaty became the most important method of effecting the paper partition of the continent.(Zizwe.2003:66)

Socially, the region of the Gold Coast was occupied by different tribes. One of the most powerful tribes were the Ashanti who exersiced their power and

influence over the other existing tribes: Fante, Guans, Dagomba, Mamprussi and others. Therefore, the Ashanti people were the first to show tribal/national belonging and fight the British in a series of wars known by the Anglo-Ashanti wars(1863-1896). At the end, the British government succeed in dominating the Ashanti tribes and their kingdom was turned into a protectorate. Indeed, the British powers submerged the area with its control over all the existing tribes and finally made the Gold Coast into a single unit.(Apter.1955: 26)

Nonetheless, in the wake of the end of the Second World War 1945, discontent with the British and the colonial rule in general was coming to the surface, and the Gold Coast people were calling for more autonomy. By 1957, the Gold Coast was granted its independence and renamed by Ghana which combined British Togoland, the Ashanti protectorate, the Fante protectorate, and the Northern Territories. Interestingly, Ghana was granted independence as a one nation; still, it was internally subdivided into various tribes, each acting and living by its own tribal standards.

Tribalism :

> The impact of the family, as an extended unit, upon present secular government in the Gold Coast is immense. Its paramountcy in the formation of tribal political role prescriptions is genuine. It was the basis for continuing lineage … It was the center in which the spirit male and blood female were manifested in the procreation and perpetuation of the social unit. Out of this, the lineage was maintained, the social organization reinforced, and the solidarity of the tribal unit protected. (Apter.1955:89)

Broadly speaking, the family, including the father as the head of the family, the mother, the children, and the grand-fathers, constitutes the heart of any tribe. It is, indeed, the nuclues of the African tribe upon which lays the first and the most important foundations of any traditional tribal system.(Apter.1955:88) Furthermore, there occurs the lineage according to which the family members goes back to their great grand-father or their shared ancestors; for example, the Ashanti tribe is based on the family system in which all families are interrelated. Meanwhile, the Clan constitutes all of the families and lineages that have common traditions, shared beliefs, and economic interests so that they would form a larger unit, the tribe, in order to create a more stronger and unified body that would protect their social, political, and economic welfare. Mainly, the tribe's chief and his committee of councelors are responisble for the tribe's internal and external affairs. In fact, the communal well-being is more prefered and worked by the tribes rather than the European and Western Individualism. (Turnbull.1964:27)

Family ⟶ Lineage ⟶ Clan ⟶ Tribe.

Figure N°1: Tribe structure

In essence, the tribe is all about a unit in which all of the social, political, and economic aspects fall under its umbrellla, as Gluckman(1960) observes 'each tribe is an organized political unit with a complex internal structure'(Lentz.1995:310). Tribes are generally based on the idea of collectivity and communism; their ancestery rituals, social beliefs, and cultural traditions are of great importance as they form the basic grounds upon which each tribe rely on; in addition, they maintain the tribal community's political and social unification. In fact, each tribe followed either a patrilineal or matrilineal framework of ancestry.

Generally, for William Bascom, tribalism can not be related only to Africa or to the African tribes for it was merely the creation of European Colonialism, in what he called "European tribalism":

> Africa has not been Balkanized by rival African nationalists of the present; these small enclaves were created through the rivalry of European powers in the past. Some Africans attribute the Balkanization of Africa to European colonialism, and some Europeans and Americans attribute it to African tribalism. Obviously, colonialism created Africa's larger nations out of the hundreds of tribal units into which the continent was divided when the Europeans arrived. Nevertheless, the small enclaves of which we are speaking here cannot be attributed either to African tribalism or to African nationalism. They are another heritage of European colonialism or "European tribalism," presenting problems which, again, have been left for the Africans themselves to solve.(1962:28)

Bascom claims that tribal divisions and conflicts are inherited from the colonial period in which the European powers subdivided the African continent according to their interests by which they neglected the alreading existing social systems. He continues to claim that the ones who suffered later by time were the Africans who were left to reconcile the concequences and damage by themselves. He further declares that tribalism can be an obstacle in the face of national unity yet it is not impossible to re-manage it in accordance to the interests of the nation, he states,

> "Although tribalism has by no means ceased to be a problem ... it, like the other obstacles to self-government, is not insuperable." Nevertheless, tribalism has not disappeared overnight with the coming of independence; it remains a continuing problem for the leaders of Africa's new nations to solve.(Bascom.1962:23)

On the same side, Iliffe(1979) and Lonsdale(1977) agree that tribalism is a 'Colonial Invention' created and implemented within the African society through the 'Indirect rule' policy as exemplified by what has been done by the British

authorities in the Gold Coast. Of course with the help and assistance of local chieftains, this process of colonization gradually swept out the African lands; indeed, in order to maintain their dominance and economic welfare, both colonial masters joined forces with the existing tribal chiefs to make sure no opposing activities will come in their way.

> Within their policy of indirect rule, the British introduced a new political geography which ran counter to these complex networks and demarcated tribes with appeals to 'tradition'. The invention of tribes, however, was not merely an administrative act supported by the British authorities' political power. It was nourished by the active participation of African actors creating political and cultural 'traditions' and a new tribal history in their own interest. 'Progressive chiefs', mission school-trained 'progressive traditionalists'. and elders played a central role in the codification of tribal 'customs,' a process which usually entailed thoroughgoing changes in the previous social organization" (Lentz.1995:317)

Within many contexts, it has been looked to tribalism as a threat to peaceful coexistence among African tribes. It was overviewed by all what is negative, evil, and harmful to human beings for the one reason that it was deeply rooted by oppositionary thoughts those that usually created conflicts and dispute between contiguous tribes. However, William Bascom proclaims that there is a tendency to see tribalism from a positive side: "Tribalism can unify divided people as well as constitute a divisive force within the countries of Africa"(1962:27). He explains that tribalism is known mainly for its power of breaking social relations among living tribes, nevertheless, it can be also used as a powerful reason for solidarity and unification.

2. The Tribal Structure in the Gold Coast:

In detail, one of the major ethnic groups are the Akans who started to move to the area around 13th C; they basically came in three waves: the Guans and other related groups were the first to come live down the Volta Valley 1200; the second wave arrived to the region about 1300. This wave settled down the south western coastal areas, they are believed to be the great ancestors of the Fante people. Afterwards, there occurred the last Akan group represented in the Ashanti tribes who occupied the central areas of the Gold Coast 15th to the 16th century. (Apter.1955:22)

On ther hand, originally coming from Sudan, the Moshi people arrived at the Northern Territories(16th to 17thC) in which they were split into three kingdoms: Mamprussi, Dagomba, and the Gonja kingdom which was a combination of Moshi and a small part of people of Akan origin living near the area. As a result, the Gold Coast became a mixture of a wide range of tribes. In fact, the Gold Coast was broadly divided into three major settlements: the Ashanti confederacy, the Fante confederacy, the Northern Territories.(*ibid*:23)

1. The Ashanti Confederacy:

the Ashanti also called Asanti, a powerful and fully independent people who pursued their own affairs and defended them hardly against any outer-attacks. They were rulled by a paramount chief called the "asantehene" who was assisted by an assembly of old, wise, and highly respected men of the tribe 'the Kotoko'(Zizwe.2003:82). The Ashanti confederacy was built up on a military basis and this helped in expanding its influence over the other existing tribes. This power led to a constant conflict between the Ashanti and the other tribes, mainly the neighbouring Fante. The Ashanti tribes were very organized as they belonged to a very strong political system in which each tribe remained internally independent at the same time obedient to the orders of the supreme chief the "asantehene". The capital of this confederacy was in Kumasi. In fact, their 'Golden Stool' was their source of power and pride. (Apter.1955:23)

According to Apter,in his work *Ghana in Transition* (1955), the Asanti tribes broke into a series of wars with the British who were allied with the Fante during the 19th C. By 1901, the Ashanti were defeated and the confederacy turned to become a protectorate under British rule. By this, the British ended the possibility of Ashanti's maintenance of the Gold Coast coastal areas. Indeed, the Ashanti remained to occur as a model of traditional resistance to colonial powers. Later by time, the Ashanti people were represented by the National Liberation Movement(NLM) 1954 which was mainly created to voice their demands, following a more modern pattern within the political sphere.

2. The Fante Confederation(the Gold Coast Colony):

The Fante, Assin, Wassaw, Denkyera people were joined together to form the Fante Confederacy in Mankesim 1871. This union was initially made to protect their region from the Ashanti hegemony that was spreading all over the Gold Coast. Because of their contineous contact with the Europeans, especially the British, these people were highly influenced by the British standards to the level of adapting their tribal and traditional ways of rulling to more Western and modern ones. (*ibid*:24)

They were highly depending on the British to protect them from the Ashanti attacks. They even joined forces with the British to fight against the Ashanti in a series of wars. Moreover, they focused on improving their living conditions on various levels: economically, socially, and politically through the implementation of roads, schools, mineral and agricultural manufactoring. In addition, they adopted a European-like political system in which they assigned a president-king and an executive council that would manage the Confederacy's interior and exterior affairs.

3. The Northern Territories:

This region is characterized of the existence of multiple tribes: the Moshi, Dagomba, Mamprussi, Gonja, and Wala tribes. Most of their customs, traditions, religious beliefs are of mutual background as they all come from the same ethnic

group, the Mole-Dagbane. These people were more in contact with the people of Sudan who in some point of time introduced Islamic customs of Patrilineal descendancy, 'territorial and secular leadership'.(Apter.1955:28) these ethnic groupings did not collide with either the British or the Ashanti as they signed treaties and even payed tributes in order to avoid direct state of warfare with the other existing regimes.

3. Pan-Africanism:

> Pan-Africanism is a political and cultural phenomenon which regards Africa, Africans and African descendants abroad as a unit. It seeks to regenerate and unify Africa and promote a feeling of oneness among the people of the African world. It glorifies the African past and inculcates pride in African values. Any adequate definition of the phenomenon must include the political and cultural aspects.(Zizwe.2003:50)

In general, Pan-Africanism is a movement that is concerned with the social, cultural, economic, and political improvement of the African race, either physically existing on the land of Africa or outside in the world, in the Diaspora, for the one belief that they are all interconnected and share the same history and experience of colonial abuse, as explained by Esdebe 1982. It dreams of unifying all people of African descent under one flag in order to fight for their rights and to join forces against colonialism, racial discrimination, and all kinds of human oppression. (Adi, 2018:2)

Historically, Pan-African ideology has been split into two major eras: within the first stage of the movement (appearing around the Trans-Atlantic enslavement period 19th century), African people living in the diasporas (America) tried to unite in order to improve their living conditions for they suffered from slavery, oppression, racism, and discrimination from the white race; in addition, they slightly looked forward to the liberation of their mother Africa from the hands of the colonial powers. The second phase which appeared after the 1945 Second World War was characterized by the emergence of a new type of Pan-Africanism centering around the African continent itself; the anti-colonial African movements, generally represented in the actions of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), later the African Union (AU), fought for their countries' independence and freedom. (Adi, 2018:4) In fact, when we look at the first country who presented Pan-Africanism in the best way was Ghana, also known as the Gold Coast. This country, with its leader Kwame Nkrumah, proved to be the most prominent country and one of the pioneers of promoting for the African race liberation by supporting the Pan-African ideas of unity and solidarity that should overwhelm the African continent as a whole.

4. Kwame Nkrumah: a Short Biography

In his book entitled *Kwame Nkrumah's Contribution to Pan-Africanism* (2003), Zizwe Poe declares that Kwame Nkrumah is considered to be a significant African leader who guided his country towards independence and succeeded in

representing Ghana as an icon of solidarity and a unified entity to the world and the other African Countries. He was born 21st September 1909 at Nkroful in Ghana. His life was full of achievements as he mainly got Western education: Britain and the United States of America. He occupied different jobs. Yet, the most important and life changing was that of working as a the General Secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) 1947, which helped making his librating and unifing attempts arise in the world of the African affairs.

By 1957, Nkrumah became the first Prime Minister; he was known of his Pan-African thoughts which were basically dedicated to the improvement of the black race; moreover, he believed that unity of purpose was a prerequisite to freedom, and that Africans from all around the world should combine their efforts to strengthen the economic, social, and political conditions of their nations. Some of the most prominent Pan-African figures that highly influenced Kwame Nkrumah in his journey in was the Trinidadian activist, C.L.R. James and George Padmore. He died on the 17th of April, 1972 at Bucharest,Romainia by the age of 63.

5. Unity Seeds within the Gold Coast Tribes:

As mentioned earlier, at the core of every African tribe there exist a unifying force that is bringing people altogether either belonging to a small rural family or even to a larger structure like the tribe. Actually, Gold Coastal tribes showed signs of unity and solidarity particularly in the way they rejected external intrusion of European powers to their regions and areas of influence. The most notable unified effort, emerged by the late nineteenth century within the area of the Gold Coast, was the creation of the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society; this organization was the first political representative that showed signs of emerging nationalism by this new educated class who claimed their people's rights to their lands and stood against the Public Lands Bill. Led by Casely Hayford, this society created an organized political force that put pressure on the British government in a form of national protective sentiments.(Apter.1955:36)

> The history of Gold Coast nationalism in modern secular form is a short one. A West African National Congress under the leadership of J. Casely Hayford, which had as its object a pan-African movement that went beyond the limits of colonial boundaries, was influential, but limited in support.(*ibid*:37)

J. Casely Hayford was among the first West Africans who welcomed and encouraged the idea of unity among people of African descent. He with other West African activists formed the West African National Congress which is considered to be one of the first embodiments of Pan-African ideas within the lands of Africa.

Originally founded in 1947, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was among the first Gold Coastal political parties, in which educated commoners united with the traditional chiefs to voice their people' s needs to the British Crown. This party mainly supported the gradual inheritance of rule from the

British instead of demanding the right to direct self-government status, as what Nkrumah did.

6. Nkrumah between Pan-Africanism and Tribalism in the Gold Coast:

> Over the next two and a half years, the National Liberation Movement (NLM) asserted Asante's right to self-determination in the face of Kwame Nkrumah's blueprint for a unitary government in an independent Ghana: a blueprint co-authored and supported by the British colonial government. NLM leaders alternated demands for Asante autonomy within a federated Gold Coast with calls for Asante's complete secession. … the NLM not only posed a serious threat to the stability of Nkrumah's pre-independence government, but it destroyed the illusion, present since 1951 and reflected in Hailey's comment at the beginning of this article, that the Gold Coast's transition to full self-rule would proceed with rapidity and order.(Allman.1990:264)

As mentioned earlier in this article, the Ashanti tribes were the first and the most prominent ethnic group within the Gold Coast. They showed strong feelings of refusal towards the British colonial existence in the area. Decades later, within the period of Kwame Nkrumah's emergent government (1950-1957), these people revived their sense of pride of their ancestors' power and influence, that once in time swept most of the Gold Coast, as they tried to separate their areas from the new emerging governing system; Jean Marie Allman in her work entitled 'The Youngmen and the Porcupine: Class, Nationalism and Asante's Struggle for Self determination, 1954–57' reports on behalf of one of the Ashantis:

> 'All Ashantis express the sentiment that Ashanti is a nation and that fact has been accepted. We are not a region at all; we should be considered as a nation....Population alone does not make a country.' (1990:265)

These deep feelings of belonging to one tribe or one region shown by the Ashanti proved to be one of the negative indicators of existing tribalism within the area of the Gold Coast. They believed that it is their right not to join the government or the nation as they considered their tribe's history and populace outweighs this new government presented by Nkrumah. In essence, these opposing attempts of the Ashanti were backed by two major factors: political and economic;

Politically speaking, the Ashanti were not granted their fine share of seats within the new Legislative Assembly- a political body that gathered representatives from all of the Gold Coast and their share was represented by the numbers of seats they get- as they were granted only two seats from the thirty seats they believed to deserve. Therefore, they rallied in the Subin River valley in Kumase in which they showed their discontent of their political representation within the government' assembly. (*ibid*: 266)

Economically, the Ashanti tribes' economy relied mainly on Cocoa production. However, by the passing of the Cocoa Duty and Development Funds Bill 'which fixed the price of cocoa at 72 shillings per 60 lb. load — a price which represented only one-third of the average prevailing world market price.' strong riots and campaigns swept all over Kumase showing disapproval with Convention The People's Party(CPP) economic policies. (*ibid: 266*) Afterwards, the creation of the NLM as the official political party was made as to protect and represent Ashanti people in formal occasions:

> the NLM was the product of large-scale cocoa farmers, powerful chiefs and businessmen, who exploited tribal attachments to gain the support of Asante workers and peasants in a class struggle against Nkrumah and his party.(Allman.1990:267)

Nevertheless, the Ashanti nationalism calling for autonomy was soon cut up by emerging conflicts between the younger generations '*nkwankwaa*' and elders of the tribe, the chiefs.(*ibid*: 276) However, through parliamentary discussions the Ashanti succeed in gaining their regional autonomy, even if little or not strongly apparent, within the Gold Coast:

> In that parliament, with the *Asantehene's* trustworthy supporters present, a compromise solution was worked out between the NLM and the CPP which entrenched the position of the chiefs in the constitution and gave some regional autonomy to Asante. The compromise may not have appeared as much of a victory for Asante in the battle with the CPP, but within Asante it marked a decisive victory for Asante's ruling class. Led by the *Asantehene,* they had succeeded, through constitutional means, in retaining their position — a position rooted in pre-colonial Asante and maintained through British colonial rule. It was a victory of continuity, tenacity and enduring hegemony. (*ibid*: 278)

On the other hand, there occurred other rival political parties such as Northern People's Party (NPP) 1954, which mainly promoted the interests of the Northern Territories 'people. In addition, The National Democratic Party (NDP), formed by the early 1950s, supported the gradual transition to the Gold Coast self-rule which was also the idea upon which the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was built. However, NDP and UGCC were joined together to form Ghana Congress Party 1952 which revealed direct opposition to Nkrumah's CPP.

In response to all opposing trials made by the living tribal systems, Kwame Nkrumah wanted to unite his people and lead them towards self-government and liberation. He adopted the one-party system in which all people of the Gold Coast would be gathered despite their ethnic or tribal differences. William. R. Bascom declares;

> Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana established a single mass party which has stated its commitment to democratic values and which has twice demonstrated at the polls that it represents the majority. Yet he has undercut the power of the

Ashanti chiefs, instituted laws permitting detention without trial, and has tried to eliminate the opposition in his attempt to create national solidarity. (1962:23)

Kwame Nkrumah believed that cohesion and stability among the existing Gold Coastal tribes were of great importance in attaining freedom. Therefore, it was necessary to eliminate any sign of opposition and rivalary between the tribes. He encouraged tribal contact and intermarriages between Gold Coastal tribes as he regarded that it was by their unified efforts they would gain their independence from the hands of colonial authorities; indeed, this what was mainly promoted by Pan-Africanism.(Bascom.1956:65)

According to his views, he was convinced by the idea that tribal ties and loyalties cannot come in the way of national welfare; instead, these ties can be developed into bonds of solidarity and unity through the shared ancestors' land, cultural and linguistic similarities, and the pursuit of independence. It is their unity that offers more than their break-up.

> Far from being opposed to change, or opposed to nationalism, they contain the very essence of the widest possible nationalism…. The flexibility of tribal systems gives them enormous adaptive power, enabling them not only to accept change but to further it, assisting new nations to unity, not despite diversity, but through it. (Turnbull.1964:22)

Conclusion:

In short, despite the diversity of the Gold Coast tribes, it is worth noting that bringing these tribes all together under one flag was not of an easy mission. There happened different clashes between the Ashanti and the Fante, for example. Yet, when it came to mutual interests they joined forces together in one period of time neglecting all what they called their tribal differences. Actually, tribalism cannot be labeled only as a divisive force; however, it can be also used as a source of strength and unity towards the attainment of liberation and self-rule.

Through, the support of the mass population, the creation of the single-party system, the elimination of opposition among political parties, Kwame Nkrumah succeed to lead his way towards independence. He succeed in proving to the world and the other African countries that unity is preliminary to liberation; by this, he is supporting the Pan-African ideals of unity among people of African descent. In this regard, it is preferred and encouraged to further and deepen ideas related to this field of research for its immense importance in offering great amounts of information about tribalism and how it overlaps with Pan-Africanism.

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