"And still the Youth are coming": Youth and popular politics in Ghana, c. 1900-1979

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the significance of the youth in the popular politics of 20th-century Ghana. Based on two and half years of archival and field research in Ghana and Britain, the dissertation investigates the political agency of the youth, especially in the domains of youth associations, student politics, and popular culture. It also examines the structural factors in the colonial and postcolonial periods that shaped youth political engagement, and how youth worked within and without these structural frames to shape popular politics. I argue that youth-centered politics has been a motive force in Ghanaian popular politics. It opened up space for subalterns to be important players in colonial politics especially as catalysts of anti-colonial nationalism. In the post-colonial period, youth politics, mostly in the form of university students' political activism, articulated public interests and was a bulwark against the authoritarianism of civilian and military governments. The dissertation charts the changing manifestations of Ghanaian youth political identity and formation from the early 1900s, when Britain completed its formal imposition of colonial rule on the territory that is present-day Ghana, to the political crisis of the late 1970s in which students and youth played crucial roles. The dissertation is a corrective to elite-focused accounts of political developments in Ghana's history. It establishes youths as historically significant players who have shaped the country's political ideas, values and practices. The dissertation also contributes to the renewed and

growing focus on intergenerational relations, generational identity, and youth in scholarship on Africa.

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Abbreviations

AASU	All Africa Students Union
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CPP	Convention People's Party
CYO	Committee of Youth Organization
GCYC	Gold Coast Youth Conference
GHANASO	Ghana National Students Organization
GYPM/YPM	Ghana Young Pioneers Movement/Young Pioneers Movement
JCR	Junior Common Room
NASSO	National Association of Socialist Students
NLC	National Liberation Council
NLM	National Liberation Movement
NRC	National Redemption Council
NUGS	National Union of Ghana Students
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
PP	Progress Party
PRAAD	Public Record and Archives Administration
SCR	Senior Common Room
SMC	Supreme Military Council
SRC	Student Representative Council
TNA	The National Archives (of Britain)
UGCC	United Gold Coast Convention
WAYL	West African Youth League

Chapter 1

Introduction: Youth, Generation and Popular Politics

The central concern of this dissertation is the interplay between youth as a generational identity and socio-political category, and popular politics in colonial and postcolonial Ghana. The question of how significant the youth have been in the country's popular politics drives the dissertation's analysis. What follows is thus a social and political history that tracks and explains the changing manifestations of Ghanaian youth political identity and formation from the early 1900s, when the geopolitical entity that is present-day Ghana came under British colonial rule, to the late 1970s, when the country experienced political crisis in which students and youth were important players. I chose the period from the early 1900s to the late 1970s for this study in order to take account of the history of social transformations that colonialism engendered and the exertions and failures of the postcolonial state, which framed the place and status of youth in the social and political landscape of contemporary Ghana. I draw on multiple archives and field interviews to examine subcultures of youth, especially of youth associations and students, and popular culture, as well as wider historical and structural factors in the colonial and postcolonial periods that shaped youth political engagement and activism. The challenges of the youth to political and cultural authority during the period opened up space and facilitated negotiations for new players in a gerontocratic and patriarchal political culture. Youth-centered politics inflected anti-colonialism and nationalism in the colonial period and continued to shape political life in the independent country, as manifested in student politics and military revolts. The dissertation is situated in a growing body of literature that is critically revising the historiography of Africa by examining the extent to which

generational politics have been implicated in the social and political life of African nations. The dissertation intervenes in Ghanaian historiography by offering a corrective to elite-centered accounts of political developments in the country's history. It argues for viewing youths, who were (and are) political subjects and social subordinates, as important historical actors in those developments. I also make a contribution to the historiography of Africa, which stresses the importance of generational identity and relations in historical change on the continent.

Studies of youth in Africa

In his survey history of Africa, John Iliffe argues that generational conflict and politics have been enduring factors in African history.[1] African studies scholarship, while acknowledging this realization, has ebbed and flowed in the attention given to youth and generation over the decades. Early studies of generation in Africa, especially in anthropology, gave way to a slump in the 1970s and 1980s but there has been resurgence in African scholarship focused on youth in recent years.[2] By its very nature, the historiography of youth has touched on every major theme in African studies. For Ghana, historical scholarship on youth is embodied in two main bodies of literature. There is the literature on the *Asafo*, the traditional militia of pre-colonial Ghanaian polities whose central agents, the 'youngmen', have been as much a subject of scholarly fascination as

[1] John Iliffe, *Africans: A History of the Continent*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 97-98.

[2] Andrew Ivaska, "The Trajectories of Youth in East Africa," *Journal of African History* 52, no. 2 (July 2011), 270. Also see G. Thomas Burgess and Andrew Burton, "Introduction," in *Generations Past: Youth in East African History*, eds. Andrew Burton and Helene Charton-Bigot (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 1-2.

they were objects of concern to colonial officials and chiefs during the colonial period. Part of the historiography of anti-colonial nationalism in Ghana also gives some attention to youth. The focus in the historiography on nationalism has largely been on how the post-Second World War mass nationalist struggle brought youth onto the political stage in the form of the 'verandah boys' – the disenfranchised and disgruntled young men (and women), some employed, others unemployed or unemployable, who helped Kwame Nkrumah and others to turn elite nationalism into mass-based politics in the immediate years before independence in 1957. They were the foot soldiers whose activism in various areas generated the impetus for a faster drive to independence.[3] This triumphant historiographical narrative, however, becomes one of failure as the ascendancy of young people to center stage in nationalist politics across Africa was soon checked by their suppression or cooptation into postcolonial state-building projects that sought to de-emphasize generational, class and gender differences and demands in the name of national unity. Some scholars have argued that the preference for authoritarian regimes in the immediate years of independence in Africa, symptomatic of the cooptation and suppression of differences silenced youth and removed them from the political stage.[4] In some other cases, the suppression and cooptation of youth was accomplished through the "invocation of African traditions that uphold rules of deference and submission between

[3] See Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); David Rooney, *Kwame Nkrumah: Vision and Tragedy* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2007), 52-90; and Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 21-28.

[4] On Ghana see, Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, 31-48. Also see, Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 66-8; and, Jay Straker, *Youth, Nationalism, and the Guinean Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

both social and generational juniors and seniors."[5] The homogenizing projects of state authoritarianism or the reification of gerontocratic traditions made less visible two important historical processes in postcolonial Africa. On one hand, they obscured the internal social and political struggles enacted along generational lines that have defined the history of postcolonial African nations. The violent roles that African youth played in postcolonial conflicts in recent decades gave episodic visibility to these generational tensions.[6] On the other hand, they obscured the many important roles that young people played in the making of postcolonial African nations even in one-party states and under the repressive military juntas that dominated African politics from the late 1960s to the early 1990s.

The resurgent literature on generation and youth in Africa is beginning to tackle some of these issues but it also raises a number of problems with which this dissertation engages. One of the key issues is the analytical utility of the category of youth. The importance of youth as a social category is not in doubt but questions remain as to its definition and deployment as an analytic category. Donal Cruise O'Brien observes that the study of youth is a "challenging research agenda" because of the multiple terms that can be used to define and represent it.[7] It is open to definition whether youth is just a generational, class

[5] Mamadou Diouf, "Urban youth and Senegalese politics: Dakar 1988-1994," *Public Culture* 8, no. 2 (1996), 225.

[6] See, for instance, Ibrahim Abdullah, "Lumpen Youth Culture and Political Violence: Sierra Leoneans Debate the RUF and the Civil War," *African Development* 22, no. 3/4 (1997): 171-215; and Ibrahim Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (1998): 203-235.

[7] Donal Cruise O'Brien, "A Lost Generation: Youth Identity and State Decay in West Africa," in *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, eds. R. Webner and T. Ranger (London: Zed Books, 1996), 55, 67-68.

or some other socio-political or socio-economic category. Lacking in the historiography is a rigorous conceptualization of "youth" and its foregrounding in contemporary African history. In some of the recent studies of African youth, there is hardly any definition of who exactly is entailed in that category and whether there is any differentiation within it. These studies assume definitions of youth without any discussion or conceptualization.[8]

There is also the tendency in the recent scholarly and popular literature to represent African youth in negative terms, as "temporary subversives," a "potential or episodic oppositional coalition" or as pawns in the hands of political elite.[9] A few examples from the 1990s and early 2000s illustrate this trend. Ibrahim Abdullah, in his article on Sierra Leone, notes the youth's search for a radical political alternative as the basis for the violence and civil war in that country in the early 1990s. He locates the origins of the war and the rebellious youth who were its lead agents in the political repression instituted by the All Peoples Congress (APC) government from the late 1960s onwards. In a one-party state where all formal dissent or opposition was violently suppressed, Abdullah notes, students and youth became the informal opposition. The youth, especially the lumpen element within it, became noticeable in the post-1945 political landscape where they served as the foot soldiers in mass-based nationalist politics and carried out the thuggery and intimidatory tactics employed by the immediate post-colonial political parties. Defined by their illiteracy or semi-literacy and general unemployability, the lumpen took

[8] See, for instance, Straker, *Youth, Nationalism, and the Guinean Revolution*. Richard Rathbone raises similar questions in his review of Jean Allman's *Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993). See Richard Rathbone, "The Youngmen and the Porcupine," *Journal of African History* 32, no. 2 (1991): 333-338.

[9] O'Brien, "A Lost Generation," 55, 67-68.

to anti-social activities such as gambling, drugs, petty crimes and violence in order to survive the lack of socio-economic opportunities. It was this generational formation, lacking socio-economic opportunities and given to criminality, which perpetrated the violence in Sierra Leone in the 1990s in their search for a radical political alternative as political actors in their own right.[10] In his work *Bo-Tsotsi*, Clive Glaser also looks at a youth phenomenon forged in the context of racial domination in South Africa. Glaser locates the youth gangsterism common to post-Apartheid urban South Africa squarely in the history of white minority domination dating back to the 1930s. The young gangsters, later to be known as "Tsotsi," emerged out of the socio-economic difficulties white racialism and segregation imposed on Africans especially in urban areas. The dislocations caused by forced removals in the 1940s further fueled the phenomenon. Having to survive on their own, the tsotsis challenged generational hierarchies and developed alternative identities that celebrated violent and aggressive masculinity and criminality. The sexual domination of women and girls, the use of alcohol and drugs, and the speaking of a distinct street argot, tsotsitaal, were central features of this gang culture. The *tsotsi* phenomenon is also an example of how local and international influences contributed to shape the experience of African youth. Besides the immediate material reality of living life on the margins of society and the need for economic survival fostered by the restrictions of racialism, the *tsotsi* were also influenced by the images of gangsterism seen in American movies. This explained the importance they attached to

[10] Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction," 203-35. Also see Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Youth Culture, Cannabis and Violence in Post-colonial West Africa," Paper presented at Boston University Graduate Student Conference on West Africa, March 9, 2007.

zoot suits with the narrow-bottomed trousers and flashy cars.[11] In the popular literature, an often-cited example is Robert Kaplan's "The Coming Anarchy," which is replete with images of anarchic and criminal youth roaming across West Africa.[12] This negative portrayal of African youth as a threat to socio-political order has largely been informed by their violent intrusions into national politics in many African countries in recent times. However, parallel to the negative picture have been youth involvement and achievements in popular culture, politics, and other areas of social existence. The historical reality has therefore been a complex one in which African youths as agents of social and political change combine idealism with destructive tendencies. As Diouf puts it, "[f]or many youths, idealism, nihilism, and sometimes even pure, childish naughtiness seem to coexist."[13] Ghana has not experienced the high levels of political violence associated with African youth in countries such as Sierra Leone and Liberia but the story of youth politics in Ghana is also not simply a story of high-minded idealism. Rather it is a story in which youth, in various ways, have been agents in Ghanaian popular politics. Reconstructing this history is a primary concern of this dissertation.

I follow the insight of Richard Waller who argues that youth agency is best seen in socio-cultural spaces where youth have autonomy. He suggests popular culture and the sphere of leisure as well as the immediate pre-independence popular politics as important sites

[11] Clive Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (Portsmouth/Oxford: Heinemann/James Currey, 2000).

[12] Robert Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994.

[13] Mamadou Diouf, "Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space," *African Studies Review*, 46, no. 2 (Sept. 2003), 9.

for studying African youth.[14] I also draw inspiration from Thomas Burgess' conceptions of youth in his study of politics in late colonial and postcolonial Zanzibar. Burgess identifies two youthful formations: vanguard youth and client youth. The vanguard youth were a cohort of young people that saw themselves as historically unique and distinct from other generations. Vanguard youth were marked by their formal education and had access to resources of extraversion – new consumer tastes and leisure styles, and interests in modernist images and ideas. In late colonial Zanzibar, this cohort was represented by the Youth Own Union (YOU) of the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) and later by the Umma Party under the leadership of Abdulrahman Muhammad Babu. Client youth, on the other hand, grounded themselves in pre-colonial age-relations. They did not view themselves as a vanguard. Client youth did not lay claim to being defined by any special historic formative circumstances but rather fit themselves into the life cycle of birth and death. This group of youth was more attuned to the politics of elders and youth, of patrons and clients.[15] Most of the subjects of my dissertation were vanguard youth. Either as associational youth in the colonial period or as university students in the post-colonial period, many of the central agents in my dissertation's narrative were shaped by particular historical circumstances and saw themselves in distinctively different ways from their elders, even if they shared some things in common with the elders. In this

[14] Richard Waller, "Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa," *Journal of African History* 47, no. 1 (2006): 77-92. Also see Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH/Oxford: Heinemmann/James Currey, 1996); Emmanuel Akyeampong and Charles Ambler, "Leisure in Africa: An Introduction," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, no. 1 (2002); and, Diouf, "Urban youth and Senegalese politics."

[15] G. Thomas Burgess, "Imagined Generations: Constructing youth in revolutionary Zanzibar," in *Vanguards or Vandals: Youth, Politics, and Conflict in Africa*, eds. Jon Abbink and Ineke van Kessel (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 57-67. For a discussion of similar conceptions of generations and generational conflict see Victor T. Le Vine, "Generational Conflict and Politics in Africa: A Paradigm," *Civilizations* 18, no. 3 (1968): 399-420.

dissertation I have focused on popular politics and to a limited extent popular culture from the early years of colonial rule to the late 1970s to make sense of youth political agency. Politics is defined in this dissertation as an ongoing process of interaction and bargaining between those who wield governmental authority and those over whom that authority is exercised. This is an expansive notion of politics which, as Wayne Te Brake has argued, allows for inclusion in the bargaining process political action that "fall short of demands for direct exercise of power and political movements that develop outside of the realm of electoral and directly representational political systems." Popular politics in this context is defined as the realm of political action occupied by political subjects, which is relative to the domain of rulers and the politics of an official elite.[16] The subjects of this dissertation, Ghanaian students and youth, were political subjects who often worked outside of official elite domains to shape the politics of the country.

Who were the youths and what exactly was this social category? The literature on youth reflects on it as a socio-economic category whose defining marker is where youth stands in relation to power, economic resources and social influence. It is not a biological age category. Youth conventionally has less power, are considered less knowledgeable and have not the full independence of their social elders. As Lawrence Grossberg observes, youth is "a space of subordination and discipline" and "largely a matter of cultural relations and practices."[17] Due to its relational quality, youth is less of a discrete or bounded identity but an ambiguous wedge between the dependence of childhood and the

[16] Wayne te Brake, *Shaping History: Ordinary People in European History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 6-7.

[17] Lawrence Grossberg, "The Political Status of Youth and Youth Culture," in *Adolescents and their Music: If it's too loud, you're too old*, ed. Jonathan Epstein (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 28-30.

independence of full adulthood.[18] For the period of this study, Ghanaian youth and students occupied this social and generational space and contested it in terms of the ways they sought to influence the exercise of power. In Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa, this understanding of youth can be traced to the pre-colonial period.

Power, Generation, and Popular Politics in Pre-colonial Ghana

In his travel account of 17th-century West Africa, the Dutch trader, Pieter de Marees, paints a picture of a lively popular culture and leisure scene in the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana). The people in the Gold Coast, De Marees wrote, "assemble in the evening and go to the market-place in order to dance there." He further described their musical instruments, the various dances, the general enthusiasm involved and the duration of these gatherings every evening. Seventeenth-century Gold Coasters were so serious about their popular arts that, "there [were] also houses where young Men learn[ed] to dance and to make music." In what appears to be a random turn from the description of this vibrant popular culture, de Marees spoke of the young men

> running along the streets at night with their Weapons and Assegais, making a lot of noise…Sometimes, when they meet another group, they get into a quarrel and start to fight…On the whole they do not lightly quarrel…[19]

De Marees' account provides glimpses of and shares important insights into the lives of youths, particularly young males, in pre-colonial Ghana. His account located youth in two important areas of popular action: the realm of popular culture and in civic defense

[18] See Thomas Burgess, "Introduction to Youth and Citizenship in East Africa", *Africa Today* 51, no. 3 (2005): viii, and Deborah Durham, "Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa: Introduction to Parts 1 and 2," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2000): 116.

[19] Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, trans. Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 172.

or military affairs. The possession of "weapons and assegais" is suggestive of the socially sanctioned military roles young men performed in Gold Coast communities. The male youths with assegais described by de Marees is evidence of the militia, later to be commonly known as *Asafo* (war people), who were the defense forces of many of the polities of pre-colonial Ghana. The Asafo was composed of non-office holding young men or all able-bodied men in a town or state of non-royal status. The Asafo therefore was essentially an institution of commoners and youth organized for military and peace time purposes.[20] Though largely a young male-oriented institution, the Asafo sometimes had female members.[21] Ray Kea argues that the management of the Asafo was an important "sector of public authority,"[22] which raises the question of the status of the Asafo, as an organized body of youthful commoners, in the social and political structures of pre-colonial Gold Coast societies, and also about the relations of youths to chiefs and elders who were the holders of power and authority. I draw on the glimpses of youth in the historical record to sketch the nature of generational relations in pre-colonial Gold Coast with emphasis on the gerontocratic nature of power, the place of youth in society, as well as the factors that framed relations among the different generations. I use the Asafo and other youthful formations like the *nkwankwaa* (young male commoners) of Asante, to reconstruct what it was like for youths in these pre-colonial societies in terms

[20] Ansu K. Datta and R. Porter, "The Asafo in Historical Perspective," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 2 (1971), 288-290; Ray Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins, University Press, 1982), 130-168; R. Addo-Fenning, "The Akyem Abuakwa Asafo, 1700-1918," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, no. 2 (1998): 7-19; and, John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu, *Asafoi (socio-military groups) in the history and politics of Accra (Ghana) from the 17th century to the mid-20th century* (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2000).

[21] Datta and Porter, "Asafo in Historical Perspective," 280.

[22] Kea, *Settlements, Trade and Polities*, 130.

of their popular political significance. The Asafo and their activities were the pre-colonial antecedent to the modern youth associational life that came into being from the late 19th century onwards when British colonialism was formally imposed in the Gold Coast.[23] The Asafo continued to be important in popular politics in both rural and urban Ghana in the early colonial period though their military roles were taken away from them under the British colonial *pax*.[24] In pre-colonial Ghana, youth were directly and indirectly agents in popular politics. As political subjects, they usually did not exercise direct power but they nevertheless were involved in making claims and entering political spaces, which had an impact on the cultural and political authority of elders.[25] In the pre-colonial era would be seen the historical and cultural scripts on which youths and other non-elite subjects drew and transformed to become significant political elements in the colonial period and beyond.

Pre-colonial gerontocracies

The sources on pre-colonial Gold Coast speak of its communities and societies as gerontocratic. Power resided in the hands of the elderly and generational identity was an

[23] The concepts of modernity and modernization, though used often in scholarship, have generated quite a body of literature that debates their usefulness as analytical categories. I use these concepts in this dissertation to denote the new lifestyles, ideas, and practices that issued from African and European interaction over the period and not as mere imitations of the West. For a critique of modernity as a concept see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 113-151.

[24] Osei-Tutu, *Asafoi in the history and politics of Accra*; Anshan Li, "Asafo and Destoolment in Colonial Southern Ghana, 1900-1953," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 2 (1995): 327-357. Jarle Simensen, "Rural Mass Action in the Context of Anti-Colonial Protest: The Asafo Movement of Akyem Abuakwa, Ghana," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 8, no. 1 (1974): 25-41; and David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 142.

[25] For insights on how ordinary people as political subjects shape the exercise of power and authority, I draw on Brake, *Shaping History*, 1-21.

important social determinant. The sources, while they differ in their details, speak of power structures at the apex of which were kings, chiefs or captains who administered the temporal and spiritual affairs of their communities. Administrative and advisory councils of elders or nobles assisted the chiefs in their various political, economic, judicial and religious functions. Membership of these councils in most communities, Bosman notes, were restricted to "persons well advanced in years [and] young men are seldom admitted into this Honourable Assembly."[26] Some variation existed in the political hierarchies of the different polities spread across the country but they were similar in privileging elder status as the prerequisite for exercising power. The power hierarchy reflected a wider social hierarchy in which elderly men and women generally occupied positions of moral authority, privilege and honor. The authority of chiefs and elders also depended on their ritual power as well as the social knowledge that life experience brought them.[27] Below the elders of society were the mass of commoners including young men and women. Young people had definite social roles to play and institutions such as the Asafo structured social experience for young males and to a lesser extent, young females.[28]

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[26] William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, New ed. (London, Frank Cass, 1967 [1704]), 134. Also see de Marees, *Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*; and Jean Barbot, *Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678-1712*, Vol II, eds. P.E.H Hair, Adam Jones and Robin Law (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1992).

[27] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, 15; Nate Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night: Popular Music and Social Change in Urban Ghana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 34-36. For discussions of age and its gender and generational implications in Ghana, see Stephan F. Miescher, "Becoming an *ɔpanyin*: Elders, Gender, and Masculinities in Ghana since the Nineteenth Century," in *Africa After Gender*, eds. Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwaa Manuh and Stephan Miescher (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 253-269.

[28] Kea, *Settlements, Trade and Politics*, 104-108, 130-133; Datta and Porter, *Asafo in Historical Perspective*, 280; and Ansu K. Datta, "The Fante 'Asafo': A Re-Examination," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 42, no. 4, (Oct. 1972), 307.

In the context of state formation facilitated by the Atlantic trade, there were variations in the degree of centralization of power within the broad gerontocratic political landscape of the Gold Coast which produced differences in the political status and weight of youth. William Bosman and other 17th-century and early 18th-century sources such as the French merchant Jean Barbot make a distinction between the monarchies and the so-called 'commonwealths' or 'republics' on the Gold Coast. In the monarchies, the gerontocratic order unquestioningly prevailed: power resided with the kings and the councils of sub-chiefs and elders or nobles that aided the kings in their administration. This would be true of the Akan states of Akwamu, Denkyira, and later of Asante. In the 'commonwealths' or 'republics', where power was less centralized, such as the coastal states of Axim and Ahanta, Bosman observes that the government was made up of two parts: the "Body of Caboceroes, or chief men [and] the other the Manceroes, or youngmen". The "caboceroes, or chief men" regularly managed the affairs of the communities. However, in military affairs the *manceroes* exercised some influence and therein resided their political weight in the 'republics.' As Bosman puts it:

> but what concern the whole land, [and] are properly national affairs, as making peace and war, the raising of tributary impositions to be paid to foreign nations (which seldom happens) that falls under the cognizance of both parts, or members of the government.

He even suggests that the youths could exercise greater influence over the elders and chiefs who "are not rich in gold and slaves,"[29], an indication of how wealth and control of material resources were crucial in the elders' subordination of youth. As will be discussed

[29] Bosman, *New and Accurate Description*, 164- 165. Also see Jean Barbot, *Barbot on Guinea*, 373.

later, the military role of young men gave them some political leverage and was the basis for their agency in popular politics even in the highly centralized states.

Office holders and elders controlled the material resources of the communities, including land and livestock, and also the labor of the younger members of society. Elderly control of resources allowed them to regulate the social mobility of youth. Male elders determined the mobility of younger kinsmen into full adulthood by given them land, and helping them to secure marriages and set up their own households. Young women's production and biological reproduction were kept firmly under patriarchal control.[30] Young people in the Gold Coast were thus largely dependent on their elders for welfare and social progress. As Murray Last has argued for the pre-colonial Hausa, who were similarly gerontocratic, the independence of elders and the dependence of youth were very important in keeping the line between the two social categories.[31]

While the historical sources are not explicit, there is enough to suggest that the transition between youth and adulthood varied little across the societies of pre-colonial Ghana even though each society may have had its own rites and rituals to mark this transition.[32] The transition though was gendered as social expectations and the rites of passage differed for

[30] Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan of Ghana, 1650-1950, *Past and Present*, no. 156 (1997), 150.

[31] Murray Last, "Towards a political history of youth in Muslim northern Nigeria, 1750-2000," in *Vanguard or Vandals: Youth Politics and Conflict in Africa*, eds. Jon Abbink and Ineke van Kessel (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 38-41.

[32] See Bosman, *New and Accurate Description*, 134. Also see de Marees, *Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*; and Jean Barbot, *Barbot on Guinea*.

young men and women.[33] For youth to be recognized as a phase in the life cycle, it was carefully framed and enshrined by a cycle of public rituals. These rituals or initiation rites served many purposes. Richard Waller stresses their importance as an instrument used by the elders to keep youth in check. Elders in pre-colonial society were always concerned with how to channel youthful energies into productive ventures. The rites in various pre-colonial societies communicated to young people the consequences of opposing elders but they were also a celebration of the maturity of young people.[34] Initiation rites also provided important social knowledge to young people and reinforced social age-deference as a principle necessary for communal cohesion. Other rites, besides initiation, also reinforced generational difference and deference. Such public rituals also served as the process by which power was formally transferred between the generations and they granted youth corporate mobility and promotion. The elaborate public ceremonies that characterized the acquisition of nobility by prominent men, *abirempon*, in the political communities of 17th-century Ghana, for instance, required levels of wealth and expenditure that was obviously out of the reach of youths and reminded them to bide their time until they became elders. Pieter de Marees observed among 17th-century Gold Coasters that ennoblement was sought after and "right from childhood they begin to make savings in order to spend them on" the rites of ennoblement.[35] While such rituals institutionalized stratification, they also promised eventual advance for the young. The

[33] Jeremy Pool, "Now is the Time of Youth: Youth, Nationalism and Cultural Change in Ghana, 1940-1966," (PhD diss., Emory University, 2009), 8.

[34] Waller, "Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa," 77-92.

[35] Marees, *Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, 168.

rites therefore gave generational antagonisms, not uncommon in these societies, an acceptable and controlled public expression, though they did not eliminate conflict.[36]

Since generation determined access to authority, status and ritual power, elderly control of resources especially land, livestock, and the productive and reproductive capacities of women was the substance of intergenerational conflict. John Illife has noted the gendered nature of intergenerational relations and conflicts in African history. He points to competition between male generations over access to wives, for instance, as an enduring factor in intergenerational conflict.[37] In pre-colonial Ghana, women were economic and cultural status goods, access to which was regulated by elders. Among the southwestern Akan of the Gold Coast, elders and political elite dealt with the sexual frustration of unmarried young men as a result of elderly control of access to women by sanctioning a form of prostitution. The women who were coerced to provide this sexual service were usually slave women.[38] Youthful frustrations with elderly control of resources sometimes led to moments of rupture when youth sought to challenge the elders. The *nkwankwaa* (youthful male commoners) of 19th-century Asante, Jean Allman notes, were frustrated by their subordination to elderly and chiefly authority. They lacked access to traditional political office and were obstructed in their economic advancement by the Asante state's

[36] Burgess, "Introduction to Youth and Citizenship in East Africa."

[37] Iliffe, *A History of the Continent*, 97-98. Also see Burgess, "Imagined Generations."; Jean M. Allman, "The Youngmen and the Porcupine: Class, Nationalism and Asante's Struggle for Self-Determination, 1954-1957," *Journal of African History* 31, no. 2 (1990): 263-279; Emmanuel Akyeampong, "What's in a Drink? Class Struggle, Popular Culture and the Politics of Akpeteshie (Local Gin) in Ghana, 1930-1967," *The Journal of African History* 37, 2 (1996): 215-236.

[38] Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution," 146-157.

monopoly over trade. The frustration of the *nkwankwaa* reached culminating point in the 1880s when they made a bid for power and succeeded in overthrowing an Asante king.[39]

The late 19th century example of the Asante *nkwankwaa* raises the question as to whether generational identities can be conceptualized in class terms. Thomas Burgess suggests that generations can be thought of as classes, since in Africa the differentiation among generations is grounded in material realities or interests. Whatever heterogeneity exists within the youth is limited by material concerns over access to land, livestock and other economic resources. The relationship of clientage that exists between youth and elders in Africa, he says, is "as real as class divisions between workers and capitalists in Europe." [40] Such 'class action' may have been what was in play when the young men in the 'commonwealths' or 'republics' of pre-colonial Gold Coast influenced chiefs and elders to see things their way over questions of war.[41] It reflected a certain degree of in-group awareness of a common generational identity and informed actions that were politically significant. The rendering of youths as part of the commoners, that is, those without power and control of resources, in the early European sources would also lend some support to this view. The class comparison with Europe is, however, reductionist and also fails to capture the peculiar situation of pre-colonial Ghana. There were class dimensions to social groups in pre-colonial Ghana but social stratification along generational lines must be understood in terms other than class. Kwame Arhin's insightful examination of classes and status groups among the Akan (Fante and Asante) in the 19th century brings

[39] Allman, "The Youngmen and the Porcupine," 268.
[40] Burgess, "Imagined Generations," 73.

[41] Bosman, *New and Accurate Description*, 165.

us closer to a more rigorous conceptualization of youth in the pre-colonial period. Arhin does not specifically discuss the *nkwankwaa* or young men but his designation of the social groupings in the stratified societies of the Gold Coast as "status groups" with ranks rather than classes, even for the Fante who by the 19th century had incipient classes, is more appropriate. Arhin notes that rank was a "position derived from status in a hierarchy of statuses which …were political statuses."[42] Youth as a social category was culturally determined in discursive interplay with certain social signifiers of which (the absence of) power is the most important factor. As Steven Salm puts it, "young people are those who the social order regards as such."[43] Youth denoted social age; it was a generational status circumscribed by various social markers of which the lack of political and cultural authority was the most important. Formal education, a changing economy with new opportunities, and the imposition of colonial rule in the late 19th and early 20th century would transform the nexus of power, wealth and statuses in new ways, which in turn gradually reformulated the hierarchy of social statuses and ranks in colonial Ghana.

The Asafo: institution and field of activity for youth in pre-colonial Ghana

The evidence is thin for the period before 1600, but the pre-colonial sources from the 17th century provide evidence of the existence of the antecedents of the Asafo by this period among the coastal societies of the Gold Coast. The institution was an indigenous development even though some of the companies, as the British called the Asafo groups,

[42] Kwame Arhin, "Rank and Class among the Asante and Fante in the Nineteenth Century," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 53, no. 1 (1983), 5.

[43] Steven Salm, " 'The Bukom Boys': Subcultures and Identity Transformation in Accra, Ghana," (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2003), 6.

owed their origins to the European presence and Afro-European relations on the coast.[44] Bosman and other European sources mention the existence of groups of young men known as *manceroes* from the 17th century.[45] *Manceroes*, was probably derived from the Portuguese word for youth, "mancebo", or the Fanti word *mbrantsie* (young men). The evidence that the *manceroes* were divided into companies and mirrored the inter-company rivalries that the Asafo became infamous for further bolsters the link between the band of youths of the 17th century and the Asafo of later centuries. De Marees' young fellows of 1602, as already mentioned, were obviously engaged in such rivalry when they quarreled and fought in the streets. The case of a captain of the Mankessim quarter of Nkusukum, a town on the Fante coast, leading his *manceroes* against Asebu, another coastal state, in 1653 is also highly suggestive of the Asafo in action.[46] The division of the coastal towns into quarters and references to companies of young men representing them, common features of coastal Fante society even up to today, lends strong support to the view that the Asafo system existed in some form in the mid-17th century. It is from the coastal Fante and Ga societies that the Asafo institution spread to inland polities such as Akyem Abuakwa, Kwahu, and Asante among others. Over time other ethnic groups such as the Krobo, Guan, and Ewe also adopted the Asafo. These adaptations appear to have only offered new ways of organizing able-bodied youth for wartime and peacetime duties. As the Asafo institution spread, it was elaborated with new features in the

[44] Datta, "The Fante Asafo," 283, 286.

[45] Bosman *A New and Accurate Description*; De Marees, *Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*; and Barbot, *Barbot on Guinea*.

[46] Datta and Porter, *Asafo in Historical Perspective*, 288, 290.

different political communities of pre-colonial Ghana and with varying degrees of integration into pre-existing social and political structures.[47]

In its generic form, the Asafo companies were a microcosm of the larger society. Various office holders managed the companies, at the apex of which was the office of the *supi* or *tufuhene* or *Asafoatse* (head of the warriors or the Asafo). Besides these formal office holders, there were others who occupied informal positions and exercised some influence in the running of any Asafo group. Referred to as the *mpanyinfo* (elders) among the Akan, this collection of informal position holders mirrored the council of elders that worked with the kings or chiefs in the larger *oman* (state). Among the Fante, a larger Asafo company may be composed of different sections, each of which would replicate this power structure and had its own *supi*, such that a council of *supifo* (plural of supi) headed the whole company. The most senior *supi*, in this case, would be the head of this council. The main body of the Asafo was the *mbrantsie*, *manceroes*, or the young men. In some pre-colonial states, the Asafo had female wings such as the *Adzewa* and Asafo *nkyerɛba* in the coastal Fante Asafo.[48] Membership of the Asafo was determined by patrilineal descent. An Asafo could incorporate various patrilineal groups whose members had specialized functions in the socio-political system or were affiliated to cults of one's father's family. Given that the Fante are generally matrilineal, the use of patrilineal descent to determine membership of an Asafo group is seen as an attempt to

[47] Ray Kea, Review of *Asafoi in the History and Politics of Accra (Ghana) from the 17th to the mid-20th century*, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 32, 2/3 (2002), 575; Addo-Fenning, "The Akyem Abuakwa Asafo, 1700-1918; Li, "Asafo and Destoolment in Colonial Southern Ghana"; Kofi Baku, "The Asafo in Two Ewe States," *Transactions of The Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, no. 2 (1998), 21-28; Nana Barfuo Abeyie I, "The Asafo and the Use of 'Ntam' in Conflicts and Conflict Resolution in Asante," *Transactions of The Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, no. 2 (1998), 34-39; Jarle Simensen, "The Asafo of Kwahu, Ghana: A Mass Movement for Local Reform under Colonial Rule," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8, no. 3 (1975): 383-406.

[48] Datta and Porter, "Asafo in historical perspective", 280

impose a structural limitation on violence, as one would be reluctant to fight his matrilineal kin, according to the theory of it. A Fante person who joined his father's military band but had his mother's relatives as his family was thus structurally discouraged from violent action towards either side. The Asafo institution thus suffused the socio-political order with the principles of both matriliny and patriliny.

The Asafo companies differentiated themselves in various ways. There were distinctions based on formal regalia like flags, drums, colors and emblems. They also differed in terms of their affiliations to different cults as well as the deities that they worshipped or to which they were attached for protection. Residential segregation was also one of the most important factors for differentiation among the various companies. The division of the coastal towns into various quarters facilitated this inter-Asafo differentiation. Some of the Asafo groups in the coastal towns were actually named after the quarters or wards where they were based. These differences were often the source of much rivalry: the various Asafo were known to use songs, appellations and drumming to mock, abuse and taunt others. Some of these moments of rivalry often resulted in violence, which was a source of grave concern to the state during the colonial period. This rivalry and competitiveness, according to Datta and Porter, can "be considered a basic feature of the modern Asafo system", that is, the demilitarized versions of the Asafo that survived the imposition of colonial rule.[49]

[49] Datta and Porter, "Asafo in Historical Perspective," 282.

As already mentioned, the primary raison d'être of the Asafo institution was its military role. The inter-Asafo rivalry notwithstanding, the various companies in a town or state, in pre-colonial times, constituted an integrated defense force against external aggressors and were also responsible for internal security and policing. Bosman asserts:

> When the Governours of one country are enclined to make War with those of another…Then they assemble together, in conjunction with the *Manceroes*, who also give their advice…; and the joynt resolution is no sooner formed than every one prepares for War…(sic)

Bosman thought that the "hopes for Plunder" of the youth made them amenable to the persuasions of the chiefs and elders in matters of war. However, the youths' participation in the decision-making must have allowed them to exercise some influence in the politics of Gold Coast societies. This limited influence on the part of the youthful members of the Asafo explains their ability to abandon the war if it did not go as they expected, "not being obliged to stay longer than themselves please."[50] The female wings provided support services in times of war.[51]

Not unrelated to the military function were the political roles that the Asafo historically performed. There appeared to have been a considerable variation in the political roles performed in the different polities of the Gold Coast, and the performance of these roles evolved across time and space. Bosman's example of the *manceroes* constituting the second arm of government in the "republics" must have been an extreme example. In other states, the Asafo were involved in the selection, installation as well as destoolment

[50] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 179-180.

[51] Takyiwaa Manuh, "Women and their Organizations During the Convention Peoples' Party Period," in Kwame Arhin, ed., *The Life and Work of Kwame Nkrumah* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1993), 103.

of chiefs.[52] In many of the states, the *supifo* or *tufuhen or Asafoatse* who led the Asafo, also served on the state councils and contributed to decision-making for the polities. That degree of political relevance was, however, more the case for the coastal states. In the polities of the interior, like Asante and Akyem, the Asafo seemed to have had limited political roles.[53] The Asafo also had limited judicial functions. The evidence indicates that this function existed even when the Asafo was in its embryonic form. The *manceroes* of the 18th century, for instance, had courts in "every considerable Village, whose Province [was] to adjudge all trivial crimes that shall appear before them."[54] The adjudication of minor criminal and civil matters by the Asafo added to the influence that they exercised in these communities. While they ceased to handle minor criminal cases after the imposition of colonial rule, they continued to handle minor civil matters.

The Asafo was also as a site for "channeling leisure and recreational activities."[55] The pre-colonial European sources are all agreed on the centrality of the bands of young men and women in popular cultural activities in the Gold Coast. They were also in charge of providing entertainment and recreation during special occasions. De Marees, for instance, recalls the "young fellows fenc[ing] and caper[ing] around" during the ceremony for ennobling an important man, probably an Asafohene, in the 17th century when he was on

[52] In the traditional polities of southern Ghana, the symbol of office of chiefs was the stool, on which they sat while performing their functions. The process of installing or deposing a chief is therefore expressed as "enstool" or "destool".

[53] Datta, "The Fante Asafo," 310 and Simensen, "The Asafo Movement of Akyem Abuakwa," 26-30; Abeyie I, "The Asafo and the Use of 'Ntam'," 34-39.

[54] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 177.

[55] Datta, "The Fante Asafo," 310.

the coast.[56] His description of the ascribed roles of the young males in the ceremony suggests that this was customary. The Asafo have gained widespread reputation for their music and boisterous singing. This seems to have been borne out of the military functions of the Asafo as songs were used to rally the youth and stimulate their martial spirit and enthusiasm in times of war.[57]

Historically therefore the Asafo was a site for socializing youths, particularly males, in Gold Coast societies. It was the one social institution that structured the experiences of youth and incorporated them into social life. It was also the means by which young people could shape the exercise of power and authority and thereby also rehearse for their own eventual active participation in communal decision-making when they became elders. In the changing circumstances of the late 19th century and early 20th century, the Asafo became one of many social sites, which allowed youth to associate and participate in socio-political life during the colonial period. The dynamics of social change from the mid 19th century involved new social identities and influenced intergenerational relations. There were continuities from the pre-colonial period, to be sure, but the onslaught of colonial modernity introduced new factors in the way commoners and youths related to their chiefs and elders.

[56] De Marees, *Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, 169

[57] See A. B. Ellis, *The Tshi-Speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast of West Africa* (Chicago: Benin Press, 1964), 325-326. Ellis' chapter on music among the Akan, though full of condescension, makes insightful connections between music and militarism among the Akan. A.B. Ellis was a British military officer who served in the Gold Coast colonial administration in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Social change in the late 19th century

In pace and dynamism the 19th century proved momentous for Gold Coast communities and societies. It was a period of changes that ushered in a new era. Besides the eventful political changes which are commonly seen as the markers of the turn from the pre-colonial to the colonial there were also economic and social changes that proved equally decisive in this period. There were changes in the Gold Coast's commercial and economic relations with European powers on the coast; Britain emerged as the dominant coastal European power, and by the end of the century, it exercised imperial sway over what was pre-colonial Ghana; and missionary activities were in full swing with important social ramifications. These broad historical events and processes implied new social experiences for youth. They introduced new factors in intergenerational relations, provided youths with new avenues to re-negotiate the way they related to power and authority holders, and birthed new social identities.

By the early 19th century, Britain had emerged as the dominant European nation in the Gold Coast. Its commercial and economic involvement with the peoples of pre-colonial Ghana superseded that of any other European nation. The formal abolition of slavery by Britain in 1807 deepened its involvement as it set about to enforce the ban on the slave trade and encouraged the trade in "legitimate" goods. For a brief period in the 1830s and 1840s, however, the British reconsidered their presence in the Gold Coast. Desiring to run on as little administrative cost as possible and having unsuccessfully experimented with administering its Gold Coast forts and castles from Sierra Leone, the British government decided to withdraw and rather left things in the hands of a group of private

British merchants who constituted themselves into a council for conducting and overseeing their affairs.[58] The British government subsidized the council and gave it administrative rights over its forts and castles. Through the ingenuity of the president of the council of merchants, George Maclean, the necessary peace and stability was established between Asante, which was sweeping down the coast to eliminate the Fante middlemen, and the Fante states. This maneuver by Maclean also ensured the gradual extension of British legal norms and jurisdiction to most of the coastal states. This was to become an important precursor to the eventual colonial domination of the entire country by the close of the century. However, the British government re-established direct administrative involvement in Gold Coast affairs by 1843.[59] By the early 1870s, Britain was the sole European power in the Gold Coast as the others, the Dutch and the Danes, sold their properties to the British and left. The British used their increasing influence and dominance to promote 'legitimate trade' as an alternative to the trade in slaves. The desire to stamp out the slave trade and practices like human sacrifice and panyaring was key in the British government's decision to reinstate direct administration of its forts and castles in the Gold Coast.[60] The new emphasis on legitimate goods spawned and spurred the growth in palm oil production among others leading to new sources of wealth for entrepreneurs on the coast and in the interior of the Gold Coast. The new commodities being produced were also necessary for Britain's industrial economy.

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[58] Harrison M. Wright, introduction to *Journal of Various Visits to the Kingdoms of Ashanti, Aku and Dahomi in Western Africa* by Thomas Freeman, 3rd ed. (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1968), viii.

[59] For a classic account of the period when the council of merchants were in charge and the activities of its president see G. E. Metcalfe, *Maclean of the Gold Coast: The Life and Times of George Maclean, 1801-1847* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[60] Metcalfe, *Maclean of the Gold Coast*, 276-293.

It was into this mix of economic, commercial and political changes in the Gold Coast that the increasing interests in missionary work in Africa by various Europeans and American religious groups found expression. The interest in missionary work was a direct result of the evangelical revivalism and spirit, which spurred the anti-slavery movement in the West. Missionizing was seen as way to turn Africans from the slave trade and supposed heathen practices. The missions also shared the new commercial motives of the British Empire in promoting legitimate trade as necessary to ending the slave trade and opening Africa up for what they perceived as spiritual and material regeneration. Very few Africans had been converted to Christianity when the new wave of European missionaries started arriving in the late 1820s and early 1830s. This reflected the failure of earlier attempts at conversion on the coast including the activities of Philip Quaque, who was sponsored by the Church of England's Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in the late 18th century to early 19th century.[61] Serious and sustained missionary work with an increasing measure of success over time therefore began from the late 1820s. In 1828, the Basel Missionary Society sent four missionaries to the Christiansborg castle in Accra. The work of the Basel missionaries took off seriously in the mid-1830s when they established themselves in the towns on the hills of Akuapem, in the immediate interior of the coast of Accra. Other missionary societies like that of the Wesleyans also started establishing themselves in the Gold Coast from the mid-1830s. Despite the high rate of mortality among the missionaries, the missionary societies continued with their

[61] See Vincent Carretta and Ty M. Reese, eds., *The Life and Letter of Philip Quaque, the First Anglican Missionary* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

work and began to see results in the increasing number of Africans who converted.[62]

The ensuing nexus of commerce, Christianity and western civilization had important implications for the African social and political landscape. The British slowly but certainly extended their influence over parts of the country. This extension of British influence and political sway culminated in 1874 in the formal establishment of the Gold Coast colony. The trade in slaves and practices like human sacrifices did not come to an abrupt end but they definitely went into decline. There was the recognition in British colonial circles that a more practical approach rather than high-minded idealism was to be adopted in dealing with these issues.[63] The trade in legitimate goods burgeoned and thus created opportunities for wealth. In these circumstances, commoners with entrepreneurial skills could aspire to making wealth, as the members of the traditional aristocracies could no longer exercise their monopoly. In the booming production and export market in palm oil and rubber of the late 19th-century, for instance, a new class of African merchants, distinguished by their non-royal status, became the successful ones. Even in Asante, where the traditional status quo was much stronger, this new "assertiveness of commoners" could not be held back. A new social group of non-royal origins, the Asante *Akonkofo* (entrepreneurs, nouveau riche), who were products of the expanding market economy in the 19th century, came to shape the social order in Asante. The origins of the group lay in the commoners who had fled from Asante to the coastal towns of the Gold Coast in the 1870s and 1880s in the wake of the civil disturbances and

[62] Wright, introduction to *Journal of Various Visits*, x.

[63] See Metcalfe, *Maclean of the Gold Coast*, 276-293.

war that rocked Asante during the period. Away from the depredations of Asante state mercantilism, they took advantage of the rubber and palm oil business to make wealth on the coast. Like the Saro of Sierra Leone and southern Nigeria, the members of this new social elite became bridgeheads of British imperialism in Asante and promoted British influence. They resettled in Asante following its defeat by the British in 1896 and sought to shape the social order through the pursuit of political office. They also established new trends of what it meant to be wealthy in defiance of the long established sumptuary norms of Asante.[64] By 1901, Asante and the Northern Territories had also come under British rule.

The missionaries, through their preaching and schools, not only made converts but also spread ideas of western modernity that became central to the emergent colonial order. The skills of literacy and numeracy that they spread through formal education engendered a new class of men, mostly youthful, who fully represented these modernizing trends. It was an archetype of these youthful educated Africans, a few of whom studied in Europe, that Richard Austin Freeman, the colonial medical official, observed in 1889 in the inland city of Kumasi, the capital of Asante:

> He was clearly not 'a scholar man' nor an ordinary 'gentleman of colour', for the costume of that individual is *sui generis* and quite unmistakable. He wore a shapely 'bowler', and a well-fitting, fashionably cut suit of clothes…But the most astonishing thing was that he wore

[64] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, Cultural Change*, 55-57. Also see Gareth Austin, "'No Elders Were Present': Commoners and Private Ownership in Asante, 1807-96," *Journal of African History* 37, no. 1 (1996): 1-30; T. C. McCaskie, "Accumulation, Wealth and Belief in Asante History I: To the Close of the Nineteenth Century," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 53, no. 1 (1983): 23-43+79; and . C. McCaskie, Accumulation, Wealth and Belief in Asante History: II The Twentieth Century, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 56, no. 1 (1986): 3-23.

> his clothes and carried his cane with the unmistakable air of a man who was accustomed to them, and not the embarrassed manner of the occasionally dressed native.[65]

The object of Freeman's surprised observation was John Owusu Ansah [Prince Ansah], whose father, also so named, had been educated in England in the 1830s. As Akyeampong argues, the young Owusu Ansah "was not aping modernity; he was modernity."[66] Freeman's surprise at finding Ansah thus dressed suggests that this spectacle was not usual in inland societies like Asante but the sartorial appearance of the younger Ansah bespoke of the changing times and the new social identity of the educated African with a modernist outlook that was coming into being. In the coastal societies, the apparition that John Owusu Ansah represented was not unusual. A longer interaction with Europe along the coast had spurred more widespread change in fashions. The 19th century witnessed the speeding up of this process.

The new class of men, young and educated, with many from chiefly families, became the stalwarts in an emergent public culture in places like Cape Coast. This intelligentsia, though small in number, proved to be influential. This was particularly so as they served as radical examples to the growing mass of youths who were availing themselves of missionary education. The emergent public culture, which they shaped, was a contested arena where, as Thomas Bender argues for America, "power in its various forms,

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[65] Richard Austin Freeman, *Travel and Life in Ashanti and Jaman* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1898), 368-369.

[66] Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Christianity, Modernity and the weight of Tradition in the Life of "Asantehene" Agyeman Prempeh I, c.1888-1931," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 69, no. 2 (1999), 281. Also see Roger Gocking, *Facing Two Ways: Ghana's Coastal Communities under Colonial Rule* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1999).

including meaning and aesthetics, was elaborated and made authoritative." The idea of public culture, as Bender uses it, is a political concept that involves various manifestations of power, political contestation, and also "provide[s] an integrating narrative focus to the otherwise inert political data and analysis of social history in a way" that narrow definitions of politics and political history cannot capture. [67] I use it in the same sense. It captures the political contestation along generational lines as well as the shaping of popular politics that contestation entailed in the history of Ghana. It was in public culture that Ghanaian youth played their generational politics, as a younger generational cohort made claims on power and sought to shape popular politics. David Kimble rightly notes that "[i]n a society in which respect and high standing had been accorded to age – this reversal of status brought about a widening dichotomy between generations, which found strong political expression during the twentieth century."[68]

An important dimension to the public culture of the Gold Coast in the latter half of the 19th century were the various initiatives by the young educated class to promote associations that would bring them together to nurture common interests and mutual development. In 1859, for instance, J.P. Brown and a few of his young friends in Cape Coast formed the Try Company, a literary and social club. The club was devoted to promoting reading and was active for a few years. Others followed this initiative: the Anomabu Temperance Society in 1862 by R. J. Ghartey, the Philanthropic Society of

[67] Thomas Bender, "Wholes and Parts: The need for synthesis in American History," *Journal of American History* 73, no. 1 (1986): 126. Bender, in his article, argues for a synthesis of American history in which the American nation is understood in a novel way as the contingent result of "a continuing contest among social groups and ideas for the power to define public culture, and the nation itself."

[68] Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 130.

Cape Coast in 1864, the Rifle Club in 1874, and a few Masonic groups or lodges in the early 1880s. The Young Men's Free and Mutual Improvement Society of Accra was formed in 1873. The Social Union by W. B. Quartey-Papafio and a few others were also formed later in Accra. This continued into the 1890s with the formation of a Cape Coast study-circle of youths, called the Star of Peace Society, in 1895, the Young Ladies' Christian Association in 1897, and a City Club, also in Cape Coast in 1897. In Accra and other major towns a similar trend was in play.[69]

Many of these new groups were short lived but they nevertheless inaugurated a tradition of clubs, leagues, societies and associations whose influence and significance was felt beyond the 19th century. Though they modeled themselves a long the lines of clubs and societies of Europe, and were often accused of verbose language and highbrow attitudes,[70] they were nevertheless devoted to the intellectual, social and political awareness and advancement of the growing number of educated and semi-educated people in the cities and major towns of 19th-century Ghana. The associations also helped to counter the impersonal and lonely life of the rapidly urbanizing towns. Given their raisons d'etre, the turn of these associations to politics was almost natural. Kimble says that by their very nature, these new associations helped "to breakdown the social barriers to [modern Gold Coast] nationalism" as many of them, by their membership, transcended ethnic barriers of the indigenous states (*aman*) of the Gold Coast.[71]

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[69] Kimble, *A Political History*, 147-148.

[70] Report of 1st anniversary celebration in *The Gold Coast Times*, 12 Nov, 1881. Cited in Kimble, *A Political History*, 147.

[71] Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 148.

Attendant to the associational life cultivated by the educated Africans and their nationalist politics was their use of print journalism. The brothers Charles and Edmund Bannerman founded the first African-owned newspaper, the *Accra Herald*, in 1857.[72] The paper solely carried the flag of Gold Coast journalism under difficulties till 1874 when James Hutton Brew established another newspaper, *The Gold Coast Times*. Brew founded another newspaper, *Western Echo*, in 1885, the same year that the *Gold Coast Times* folded up. By the end of the 19th century, over 20 newspapers had been established in the colony. Most of them were established in the coastal cities of Accra and Cape Coast. A few of them survived into the 20th century.[73] These newspapers were forums for the discussion and advocacy of nationalist opinion and agitation. The papers covered and debated issues such as indigenous rights, land legislation, political representation and racial discrimination.

The newspapers were almost entirely in the hands of the class of educated men who owe their social status to the changes of the 19th century. The leading names among the proprietors, editors and writers of these newspapers included Charles and Edmund Bannerman, James Hutton Brew, Timothy Laing, John Mensah Sarbah, Joseph Casely Hayford, the Rev. S. R. B. Solomon (later known as Rev. Attoh Ahuma), Rev. K. Egyir Asaam, and the many others who formed part of the proto-nationalist core in the Gold

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[72] K.A.B Jones-Quartey, *A Summary History of The Ghana Press, 1822-1960* (Accra: Ghana Information Services Department, 1974), 4-6.
[73] See Jones-Quartey, *Summary History*; and, K.A.B. Jones-Quartey, *History, Politics and Early Press in Ghana: The Fictions and the Facts*, (Accra: School of Journalism and Communications, Legon, 1975).

Coast at the time. Indeed, the press was the main conduit by which some of these early Gold Coast nationalists came into public life.[74] The young Casely Hayford, who went on to become the dominant nationalist figure of the 1920s, is a notable example. His uncle, James Brew, recruited him to work on the *Western Echo* when it was founded in 1885.[75] These educated Gold Coasters were more influential than their small number would suggest. The press provided them the forum for extending their influence. Of this late 19th and early 20th century press, Rosalynde Ainslie notes:

> It gave a voice to a subject people, through its literate elite, and established a tradition of political criticism and debate which served both to keep the colonial administration alive to public opinion, and to make public opinion aware of itself.[76]

It is the potential and ability of the literate elite to shape public opinion and the example they set for the mass of youths and commoners in Gold Coast society that attracted the attention of both the traditional leaders and the colonial government in the late 19th century and the 20th century. The colonial state, on one hand, would come to view the 'spectre of the educated African' with great suspicion and indicate unambiguous preference for the traditional rulers in its policy of indirect rule in the 20th century. The chiefs, on the other hand, had an uneasy relationship with the new class of educated men. While some chiefs wanted the benefits of the western modernity that the educated Africans represented, they were also all too aware of the threat they posed to the status

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[74] Yaw Twumasi, "Press Freedom and Nationalism under colonial rule in the Gold Coast (Ghana)," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, VII, 3, (Dec. 1974), 500.

[75] Jones-Quartey, *Summary History*, 9.

[76] Rosalynde Ainslie, *The Press in Africa: Communications Past and Present* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), 30.

quo. The existence of the new group, threatened to upend the hierarchy of statuses and ranks, defined by social age and control of material resources, which had structured the societies of pre-colonial Ghanaian societies.[77]

The British initially toyed with the idea of direct rule in the 19th-century Gold Coast. There was some talk in colonial governing circles of using district and provincial commissioners to rule. In 1888, for instance, William Brandford Griffith Junior, the Queen's Advocate and son of the Gold Coast's colonial governor, envisaged the "tottering and uncertain power of the chiefs" to vanish and anticipated the British "rul[ing] through the District Commissioners…on the coast."[78] Traditional leaders who sought to challenge the gradual expansion of British jurisdiction and power in the late 19th century were deported from the colony. The examples of Kings Aggrey of Cape Coast (1866), Kobina Gyan of Elmina (1874) and Takie Tawia of Accra (1880) represented this strategy. However, various practical reasons made direct rule less feasible and the idea was abandoned. As Mahmood Mandani argues, the British had come to see indirect rule as a pragmatic solution to the governance challenges facing the empire from the mid-19th century. In Africa, the policy of indirect rule saw full

[77] See Akyeampong, "Christianity, Modernity and the Weight of Tradition," 281, on the suspicion with which the Asantehene Osei Bonsu viewed the form of westernization that men like the young John Owusu Ansah represented. The Asantehene believed that form of westernization had destroyed Fante country in weakening the power of their traditional rulers and bringing them to the level of commoners.

[78] TNA: CO/96/191, Memorandum on Native Prisons by Governor Brandford to the Secretary of State, 10 April 1888, cited in Roger Gocking, "Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast: Competition for Office and the Invention of Tradition", *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 28, no. 3 (1994), 425, 442.

application after the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885.[79] Britain's desire to have an empire on the cheap made the use of local allies in the administration of colonies more desirable. The co-operation or collaboration of local traditional leaders was necessary if the colonial project was to succeed.[80] The existence of indigenous polities in the Gold Coast with clear-cut power structures and office holders made the idea of indirect rule more appealing to the British. The opposition and challenge of a growing class of well-educated indigenous professionals in the Gold Coast to British colonial policies also made chiefs and other traditional authorities better allies of the colonial state.[81]

By the early years of the 20th century, as formal colonial rule was being consolidated in the Gold Coast, a political dynamic that turned on generational differences was also being embedded in the politics of the colony. The roots of this generational politics predated colonialism but it gained a new lease of life and took on new forms under colonial rule. The youth of the Asafo lost their niche as the lumpen militariat of the previous centuries but they managed to function as the voices of commoner interests in some traditional chiefly areas. Other youths, especially those who were educated, took to organizing associations, clubs, leagues and societies that overtly or covertly engaged both the colonial state and the 'natural rulers' whose collaboration underpinned the governance of the colony. Youth-centered politics, far from being a marginal phenomenon, shaped the political culture of colonial Ghana. It served as the pivot for the projection of the interests

[79] Mahmood Mamdani, "What is a tribe?," *London Review of Books*, 13 September 2012. Also see Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[80] See Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for A Theory of Collaboration", in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, eds. E. R. Owen and R. B. Sutcliffe (London: Prentiss Hall Press, 1972).

[81] Gocking, "Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast," 425.

of non-elite colonial subjects. There would be continuities and change in this generational politics during the post-colonial period as university students' activism and politics became the most important terrain of youths' involvement in national politics. In its colonial and postcolonial history, Ghana's gerontocratic political culture and social order had to constantly respond and adapt itself to this generational politics.

Sources and Methods

This dissertation is derived from archival and fieldwork conducted in Ghana and Britain. The archival sources include materials collected in Ghanaian depositories, mostly at the Public Record and Archives Administration (PRAAD) in Ghana's capital of Accra, and PRAAD's regional branches in Kumasi, Takoradi, Cape Coast and Tamale. I also researched at the Balme Library and the Institute of African Studies Library, all at the University of Ghana, where I found relevant national newspapers and student magazines. I also collected archival materials emanating from Ghana's colonial and postcolonial periods in the British National Archives at Kew, London, the African collection at the Rhodes House Library of Oxford University, and the Colindale Newspaper Library in London. For the more contemporary period, I combined archival sources and newspapers with primary sources published online, some of which were very important in helping me fill gaps in my knowledge or generate knowledge about the key actors in my narrative that I could not find elsewhere. The overall body of primary sources on which the evidence, analysis and argument of the dissertation are based includes government documents, records of youth associations, newspapers, student magazines, missionary archives, diaries, memoirs and autobiographies, and field interviews.

One of the key concerns during my research was to find primary sources that capture the voices of Ghanaian youth during the colonial and post-colonial period so that I could approach the central subjects of my dissertation through their own words and not just that that of their elders or governments who, by the practices of officialdom, have left more documentation than the youth. Records of Ghanaian youth associations and newspapers found both in Ghana and Britain allowed me to access the voices of youth. Reading certain government documents against the grain or in more creative ways also helped to identify the motivations of youth even if their voices were muted in those documents. The files and documents generated by Ghana's colonial government from inquiries into native dances such as PRAAD ARG 1/1/15 or PRAAD 11/1/884 which contains the correspondence among chiefs, the Secretary for Native Affairs and colonial district and provincial commissioners, are cases in point. A careful reading of the correspondence between chiefs and colonial officials or enquiry reports into particular dances or documented discussions about by-laws that chiefs had passed to ban 'indecent singing and dancing' among youth revealed some of the motivations of youth. The correspondence also revealed the concerns of chiefs and the reasons for the colonial government's constancy in backing the chiefs even if government officials did not see anything wrong in the behavior of youth. In these files among others, one could see the workings of the colonial state, the constant making and remaking of colonial authority, and the extent to which political subjects such as the youth of the Gold Coast were implicated in colonial governance and the exercise of power.

For the postcolonial period, perhaps the greatest archival find were the TNA: DO 153/62 and TNA: DO 153/63 at The National Archives of Britain (TNAB), which contain documents relating to the "political situation in Ghana's universities" in the early to mid 1960s. The sources in these two files – secret and confidential reports of the British High Commission in Accra, correspondence, student magazines, reports and communiqués of the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) and national newspapers among others – helped to reconstruct and analyze the relationship between the Nkrumah government and the budding student movement of the 1960s. These sources reveal a high degree of political consciousness and activism among Ghanaian university students in that period which sharply contradicts the claims of scholars, who in the wake of the global student and youth protests of the late 1960s, concluded that there was no political activism among Ghanaian students during the Nkrumah era. The sources are also very important in allowing access to the voices and motivations of the students themselves.

The sources on the post-Nkrumah period are also rich and there is quite an array of them. I conducted a number of interviews with former students especially those who were in leadership positions such as Kwasi Gyan-Appenteng to gather information on their personal experiences of the activities of the student movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. On the basis of these interviews, I was able to track other relevant personalities and sources for the period. I was able to gather a body of self-written materials from key personalities that included memoirs, short profiles and reminisces, and online media essays among others. While a few of these materials were problematic, in terms of lack of clarity about the actual dates of events or confusion over certain facts, they were very

helpful in giving an in depth picture of student activism. An example of this material is the personal recollection of Nyeya Yen, a student of the University of Ghana in the late 1970s, of student movement activities. The recollection was published online.[82] Though the chronology of events in Yen's account is occasionally muddled, it is still very useful. I was able to reconstruct and analyze aspects of students' involvement in Ghanaian national politics in the 1970s by reading Yen's piece in relation to his colleague, Zaya Yeebo's part-history part-memoir, *Ghana: The Struggle for Popular Power*,[83] as well as John Mahama's memoir*, My First Coup d'état*,[84] and the interview with Kwasi Gyan-Appenteng and Gyan-Appenteng's writings among others.[85] There is oral information I collected from interviews during fieldwork that has not been directly used in this dissertation. This information provided general background during research; they guided me to other sources. There are still gaps in the primary sources and the available sources do not answer all questions. More fieldwork and oral interviews might unearth a lot more material on student and youth politics in the 1960s and 1970s in Ghana. One of the key areas to work on, in terms of sources, would be the relationship between the National

[82] Nyeya Yen, "I am nobody's small boy," Centre for Conscientist Studies and Analyses Network, 6 May 2014, https://consciencism.wordpress.com/organise/yen-nyeya-i-am-nobodys-small-boy/. (Accessed 27 November 2014). Also published on *Modern Ghana News*, 6 May 2014, http://www.modernghana.com/news/539424/1/i-am-nobodys-small-boy.html.

[83] Zaya Yeebo, *Ghana: The Struggle for Popular Power* (London: New Beacon Books, 1991).

[84] John D. Mahama, *My First Coup d'état And Other True Stories from the Lost Decades of Africa* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2012).

[85] See Asiedu-Acquah Field Notes (AAFN): Interview with Kwasi Gyan Appenteng, September 2010; Kwasi Gyan-Appenteng, "Comrade Akrofi – Gone but not forgotten," *Daily Graphic*, 27 June 2014 (Accessed online on 29 June 2014); and, Ekwow Spio Garbrah, "Vandalism: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *The Ghanaian Observer*, 28 May 2010, http://www.ghanaianobserver.net/content/vandalism-yesterday-today-tomorrow. (Accessed on 19 August 2010).

Union of Ghana Students and the various youth and student organizations that came into being in the 1960s and 1970s.

Structure of the dissertation

The four remaining chapters of the dissertation look at the different dimensions of youths' involvement in popular politics in colonial and postcolonial Ghana. They are organized both thematically and chronogically. Chapter 2 examines youth popular culture, especially dance and music, as a site of contestation between youth and colonial elders from the early 1900s to 1930. I argue that youths' use of dance and music to question chiefly power and exercise a political voice allowed for the elaboration of critiques of colonial power that shaped popular politics in the early colonial period and beyond. The analysis of the chapter is done against the background of political and socio-economic changes, which served as the general and causal context for young people's use of popular culture to critique colonial power as well as pursue and express autonomy. These important political and socio-economic changes were the elaboration of the colonial policy of indirect rule, the expansion of the colonial economy exemplified by a boom in cocoa production, which brought wealth to many youthful commoners, the spread of formal education, and increased migration to urban areas by youth. The ramifications of these changes were felt in both rural and urban colonial Ghana. Chapter 3 looks at the interplay among four historical developments that shaped generational politics and anti-colonialism in colonial Ghana in the 1930s and early 1940s, and their long-term impact on the post-WW II nationalist struggle leading up to independence in 1957. These developments were the greater incorporation of the chiefs and elders of the

various ethnic groups in the colony into colonial governance; the expansion in formal education and increase in the number of educated youth in the colony who were open to radical nationalist messages; the emergence of associations, which drew on local and international currents of thought, practices and events to channel youth political consciousness into anti-colonial nationalism; and the impact of the global economic depression of the 1930s. I argue in this chapter that it was in the period from the late 1920s to the early 1940s, the long 1930s, as it were, that generational politics was firmly embedded as a motive force in anti-colonial nationalism in the Gold Coast and thus foregrounds the origins of the post-Second World War mass nationalism whose triumphant embodiment was Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP).

In Chapter 4 and 5, I focus on student political activism as the most significant expression of youth politics in the context of postcolonial national politics. Chapter 4 examines student politics in Ghana's first decade of independence under Kwame Nkrumah. Contrary to the existing scholarship which ascribes little significance to student and youth politics in the Nkrumah period of the late 1950s and 1960s, I argue that student and youth politics in this period of Ghana's history produced people, actions and ideas that shaped the political development of the country. The Nkrumah period marked the beginnings of a postcolonial student activist tradition that influenced national politics. Chapter 5 examines student and youth activism in national politics in the period from the overthrow of the Nkrumah government in 1966 to 1979 when the military regime of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) took over the reins of government after a successful coup against another military regime, the Supreme Military Council (SMC).

The activism of students in this period, I argue, represented public interest, held leaders accountable, and was the catalyst in the opposition to the authoritarianism of governments. Student involvement in Ghanaian national politics from the late 1960s to the late 1970s was conditioned by several factors which included the tradition of activism carried over from the Nkrumah period, general political and economic decline including deteriorating conditions on the campuses of the universities, as well as governments' inability to deal with these problems amidst popular charges of political corruption and governmental attempts to suppress dissent and criticism. International developments such as the global youth protests of the late 1960s and the politics of the Cold War, and the appeal of radical internationalist critiques of neo-liberalism among radical student groups reinforced these factors. In the context of successive changes in government and an alternation between civilian and military rule in the late 1960s and 1970s, student activism pushed for a governance model at the national level that was more participatory and demanded that the voices of youth be taken seriously. Students crafted an independent role of articulating public interests and demanding political reforms. The conclusion of the dissertation, in the form of an epilogue, recounts how the developments of the late 1970s shaped Ghanaian politics in the 1980s and beyond. Students sought to play a more influential role in national government due to their catalyzing role in the movement against the military dictatorship in the late 1970s. The military junta that rule Ghana in the 1980s, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) provided that opportunity for the left-leaning members of the student movement. The National Union of Ghana Students, as the spearhead of the student movement, initially supported the PNDC but soon became a leading source of opposition to the regime. The epilogue then

discusses the changes, continuities and possibilities in student and youth politics since Ghana's return to democratic rule in recent times.

Chapter 2

"Reproach against their Chiefs and headmen": Youth, Dance Music, and Popular Politics, c.1900 -1930

In the evenings of July 1926, the youth of the Manya Krobo chiefdom of the Gold Coast colony would gather to entertain themselves. Amid drumming and singing, young men and women danced and engaged in play till late into the night. This leisure activity brought a lot of pleasure to the youth in that district and had become hugely popular. At the sound of the drum every night many youth including even children thronged to the grounds across the chiefly district where these dances were being held. The *Konor* (senior or paramount chief) of the division, his sub-chiefs and elderly councilors, however, thought these dances to be "quite impious and rather abominable". In early August, the *Konor*, E. Mate Kole, wrote to his district's colonial commissioner that the native administration, of which the Konor is the head, had banned the dances to protect the morals of the youth. The Konor's letter also revealed a political motive for the authority's action:

> These dances, I regret to say, did not lead them to the verge of immorality alone, but reacts on them the possibility of bringing them into a state of disobedience…. In these dances, the dancers even went so far as to inaugurate songs of reproach against their Chiefs and headmen. The elders of this division therefore thought it expedient to suppress these dances.[86]

It was really the "state of disobedience" into which the songs and dances put the youth that bothered the traditional leader and his elderly advisors. The *Konor* and his elders'

[86] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884, E. Mate Kole, Konor Manya Krobo, to the District Commissioner, Volta River District, Akuse, 2 August 1926.

concern about youth reproaching power and authority holders through popular culture was a widespread one in the Gold Coast and it had been so throughout the early decades of the 1900s. There was a moral and political panic about youth leisure and popular cultural activities in chiefly and elderly circles throughout the colony. Colonial officials were also concerned because of the implications it had for social and political order. Both the chiefs and the colonial officials were often encouraged by Christian missionaries, who were interested in the moral health of colonial youths and worried about the "harm done by these immoral songs and dances," as the Catholic Bishop of the Keta Diocese of the colony, Augustine Herman, was to write to a colonial official about another dance, *Egbanegba*, in 1929.[87] Colonial officials and indigenous leaders accurately perceived in youth culture critiques of power holders. These critiques questioned the local power and authority of chiefs who were critical to the success of colonial rule. Under the policy of indirect rule, the colonial state and the chiefs came together to control youth popular cultural activities. For youth, in both rural and urban areas, the ramifications of indirect rule and expanding opportunities in the growing colonial economy compelled and facilitated a pursuit of autonomy. Emmanuel Akyeampong argues that popular culture and leisure activities provided youth with greater autonomy and allowed them opportunities to define themselves in socially distinct ways from their 'oppressive' elders. The opportunities for creativity and self-assertion in popular culture were crucial in the

[87] See PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Letter from Secretary of the Scottish Mission of the Gold Coast to the Secretary of Native Affairs, 11 October 1928 and PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884, Extract of a personal letter from Bishop Augustine Herman [Catholic Bishop], 18 January 1929; and, Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night*, 55-57.

process.[88] Gold Coast youths' pursuit of autonomy and a political voice, a key element of popular politics in the early decades of the 20th century, found expression in popular culture. Through dance and music, youth questioned the control of the traditional leaders and compelled the colonial state to rethink how to govern colonial society. The youths' criticisms of the authority of chiefs were in the same vein as the political action of the Asafo who went about deposing chiefs that the Asafo deemed unresponsive to the concerns of their subjects in the early period of colonial rule.[89] The dynamics of popular politics from the early 1900s to the end of the 1920s in the Gold Coast was therefore as much due to the efforts of youths as it was to the colonial officials and their local allies, the chiefs.

Social historians of Africa have looked to African popular culture and leisure during the colonial period to understand the social change occasioned by colonialism. Besides recreation, Africans fashioned new dance and musical forms to negotiate colonial political and social relations, and also make sense of changes induced by colonialism. Scholars have noted the political salience of this early colonial popular culture. The politics of popular cultural forms such as the Beni brass band music of eastern Africa and southern Africa and the neo-folk music of the Ambas Gede Voluntary Association of Sierra had generational, gendered, and anti-colonial implications. The associations of youth that spread Beni music into rural eastern Africa, for instance, used the music and

[88] Akyeampong, "Youth Culture, Cannabis and Violence in Post-colonial West Africa," 8. Also see Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*.

[89] Li, "Asafo and Destoolment," 375-357.

the social space it created to question the authority of tribal elders.[90] For colonial Ghana, Nate Plageman argues in his recent work that the dance and musical styles that emerged in the early decades of 1900 were largely produced by young men and women who used them to express their lack of political voice and marginalization as they moved into urban areas for social and economic opportunities. Gold Coast youths also used the new dance musics that they evolved in the early colonial period to demand "newfound rights and responsibilities", which included having a greater say in courtship and marriage, and in romantic and sexual relationships, areas of social life which had been under the control of family and lineage elders. The colonial governing establishment of officials and chiefs saw these music and dance styles as threats to "effective governance". The authorities' attempts to "criminalize and eliminate" these dances and musics, Plageman contends, reflected ways to expand colonial power "into spaces and onto populations operating beyond their effective control." In this perspective, youth popular culture, for all its potential, failed in the long run to challenge the socio-political marginalization of colonial young men and women.[91] The development of these colonial popular cultural forms among youths in Ghana was however not just an urban phenomenon; it was also rural in its sweep. This reality was part of the growing concerns of government officials

[90] John Collins, "The Generational Factor in Ghanaian Music: Concert Parties, Highlife, Simpa, Kpanlogo, Gospel and Local Tehno-Pop," in *Playing with Identities in Contemporary Music in Africa*, eds. Mai Palmberg and Annemette Kirkegaard (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002), 61-62; Terence Ranger, *Dance and Society in East Africa, 189-1970: The Beni Goma* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975); David Copeland, *In Township Tonight: South African Black City Music* (London: Longman, 1985); Marissa Moorman, *Intonations: A Social History of Music and Nation in Luanda* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008); Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000); Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night*; and John Collins, "Ghanaian Popular Performance and the Urbanization Process, 1900-1980," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, no. 8 (2004): 203-226.

[91] Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night,* 32-33, 52-54.

and chiefs about popular culture and its political implications for undermining authority throughout the colony. Dance and music became sites of contestation between youth, on one hand, and the chiefs and state officials, on the other hand. The moral and political panic that attended youth popular culture within official colonial circles was indicative of its political consequences not only in terms of its anti-colonial potential but its implications for generational and gender relations.

The nature and evolution of the new dance musics in early colonial Ghana indexed wider social and cultural dynamics of the early colonial period that were sometimes subversive of existing social hierarchies and mores. Plageman observes that hitherto many music and dance forms as well as ritual music reinforced socio-political hierarchy and "were rigid domains that paid public recognition to chiefs, elders and local authorities." This was achieved by adherence to fixed forms and the restriction of individual creative innovations in public performance.[92] Young people took creative liberties with some recreational dance music forms to critique the older generation in pre-colonial times, as John Collins argues, but the late 19th and early 20th century music and dance forms and styles that became sites of generational political contestations marked a departure from the pre-colonial situation.[93] The new dance and music styles of the early colonial period were creative mergers of African dance musics and European music styles of varied sources. These included the recreational dance and music styles of the coastal Fante and the Ga, military brass band music played in the European forts and castles on the coast of

[92] Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night*, 37.

[93] John Collins, "The Generational Factor in Ghanaian Music," 60-61. Also see J. H. Nketia, *Folksongs of Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1973).

the colony, and the hymns and piano music introduced by Christian missions. Added to these sources were the ditties and folk music of West Indian and other West African seamen who visited the port towns of the Gold Coast. As the new dance and music styles spread into the interior of the colony, they were adapted and fused with existing recreational music and dance forms.[94] This mélange allowed its youthful creators and purveyors to break with tradition, articulate concerns that question the authority of elders, and pursue recreational styles and in spaces that did not have the sanction of their social superiors. As would be elaborated later, the new dance musics, for instance, facilitated a high degree of social mixing and romantic encounters between young men and women that was hitherto not possible. There were also instances where the youth took liberties with ritualized contexts and performances for the purposes of their own generational critiques. Due to their popularity among young men and women who travelled to colonial towns and cities for work and educational opportunities, and returned to their rural homes every so often, the new popular cultural forms had considerable circulation. The colonial archives contain correspondence and enquiries between and among central government officials, on one hand, and district and provincial commissioners, and chiefs, on the other hand, about the presence and prevalence of dances and music emanating from the coastal urban areas in the interior of the colony.[95] Early colonial youth pop culture should be understood not only as symptomatic of the search for autonomy by colonial youth but also as a site for originating and elaborating critiques of colonial power, which would remain relevant, both in style and content, even into the post-Second World War phase of

[94] E. John Collins, "Ghanaian Highlife," *African Arts* 10, no. 1 (October 1976), 62.

[95] See PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Enquiry into Native Dances File. The file contains correspondence covering the years 1906, 1907 and 1908.

the anti-colonial struggle. In this chapter, I examine youth popular culture, especially dance and music as a site of generational politics between youth and colonial elders from the early 1900 to 1930. This is done against the background of political and socio-economic changes, which served as the general context for young people's use of popular culture to critique colonial power as well as pursue and express autonomy. These important political and socio-economic changes were the elaboration of the colonial policy of indirect rule, the expansion of the colonial economy exemplified by a boom in cocoa production, which brought wealth to many youthful commoners, the spread of formal education, and increased migration to urban areas by youth. The ramifications of these changes were felt in both rural and urban colonial Ghana.

Chiefs and Indirect Rule

By the turn of the 20th century, the British colonial administration had indicated a clear preference for using the 'natural rulers' in the service of colonial governance. Asante, and by extension Akan gerontocracy, became the exemplary model of indigenous leadership that British indirect rule preferred and utilized. As Robert Addo-Fenning puts it, the political structures of the pre-colonial Akan became the "prototypical system of traditional governance under colonial rule."[96] With a panoply of native authorities, native tribunals, native prisons, native police and native treasuries, backed by ordinances, the

[96] Robert Addo-Fening, "Chieftaincy, Colonialism and the Atrophy of Traditional Governance in Ghana," in *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and the Humanities through African Perspectives*, Vol I, eds. Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012), 684. On emergence and expansion of Asante see Kwame Arhin, "The Structure of Greater Asante," *Journal of African History* 8, no. 1 (1967): 65-85, Thomas McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-colonial Asante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

colonial state elaborated the institutional and legal architecture of indirect rule in the Gold Coast over the period. Roger Gocking, taking after Robert Stone, distinguishes between two phases of the policy. Prior to the 1920s, a non-interventionist indirect rule policy was in play. The colonial government, in the non-interventionist phase, utilized the judicial and political functions of the chiefs and elders of the societies and communities of the Gold Coast that is, the native states, in government. The colonial government only sought to support and enhance the native states in their functions. There was less of an attempt to actively restructure indigenous institutions or re-engineer customs and traditions as would happen in the interventionist phase from the 1920s.[97] The emblematic legal lynchpin of the non-interventionist indirect rule policy in the Gold Coast was the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance (NJO) of 1910.[98] The ordinance empowered chiefly councils or native authorities throughout the colony to make by-laws that would promote the welfare of their subjects and ensure stability and order. The ordinance was the ultimate legal basis of the July 1926 by-law, which the Manya Krobo Native Authority used to ban the alleged impious and abominable dances and songs of youths in the area.[99] The ordinance also formalized the establishment of chiefly tribunals throughout the colony, stipulated the fines and fees the tribunals could charge, and obliged them to keep written records of their judgments. The ordinance was amended at various times over the colonial period to reflect the changing strategies of the colonial government with respect to how to instrumentalize native institutions for colonial administrative purposes.

[97] Gocking, "Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast," 431-434.

[98] The original ordinance was promulgated in 1883.

[99] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Manya Krobo Bye-Laws Under Native Jurisdiction Ordinance Cap 82 Section 5 [of 1910], 15 July 1926.

The native tribunals or courts bolstered the powers of chiefs over their subjects. The courts thus became instrumental in the generational politics of the period, as they were sites for contestations over customs and traditions between chiefs and elders with the support of the colonial government, on one hand, and commoners, on the other hand.[100] As Martin Chanock has argued for colonial southern Africa, the idea and practices of customary law were more the product of the designs of chiefs seeking to exert control over young men and women in the rapidly changing context of colonialism rather than pristine phenomena from the pre-colonial past. Colonial officials fully supported the chiefs because chiefly and elderly rule was a necessary part of colonial governance.[101] There were limits though on how much "invention" of customary law colonial chiefs could undertake, as Thomas Spear notes, but chiefs boosted their powers with the opportunity they had to tinker with custom beyond what was ordinarily the norm.[102] In the Gold Coast, chiefs embarked on this undertaking in the early decades of the 1900s by looking to and receiving the support of the colonial administration. Like their counterparts in southern Africa, Gold Coast chiefs became alarmed at the increasing independence of the youth, which was facilitated by new opportunities under colonialism. The structures and ordinances of colonial rule such as the native tribunals and courts

[100] See, for instance, Diary entry on 24 August 1916 by C. E. Skene, District Commissioner, Juaso, Central Province, Asante in Thora Williamson (comp.), *Gold Coast Diaries: Chronicles of Political Officers in West Africa* (*Africa* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 2000). Also see Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, and Roger Gocking, "British Justice and the Native Tribunals of the Southern Gold Coast Colony", *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 1 (1993): 93-113.

[101] Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and the Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[102] See Thomas Spear, "Neo-traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (2003): 3-27.

would be the contested instruments for chiefly control. Many chiefs also used the courts to financially support themselves and meet the requirements of their office. In a comment on the native court of the *Omanhene* (senior chief) of the Asante chiefdom of Mampong in 1917, the colonial commissioner for Asante, F. C. Fuller, noted the heavy fines and fees the court charged and observed perceptively that "generally speaking, the *omanhene* depend [sic] on these fees to keep up pomp and circumstance".[103] The privileges, power and financial rewards that inured to chiefs explain the vigorous pursuit of chiefly office by the elite of the coastal towns in the early decades of the 20th century. This resulted in many disputes over succession to chiefly positions in Ghana, especially in coastal towns and cities such as Cape Coast, Elmina and Accra.[104]

The colonial government acknowledged the abuses to which some chiefs put the instruments of indirect rule and were often concerned about the heavy-handedness that some chiefs displayed towards their subjects, especially when it threatened to provoke actions from the youths that would undermine good order and stability.[105] However, the tendency was for the colonial government to always back the chiefs as the best strategy for maintaining control and administering the affairs of the colony. Governor Hugh Clifford expressed this point of view and policy strategy when in 1916 he informed the Secretary of State for the colonies that:

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[103] Diary entry of 9 Aug. 1917 by F. C. Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Asante (CCA), in *Gold Coast Diaries*,135.

[104] Gocking, "Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast," 431-442; and Gocking, "British Justice and the Native Tribunals of the Southern Gold Coast Colony": 93-113.

[105] Diary entries of 21, 22 August 1916 by F. C. Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Asante, *Gold Coast Diaries*, 122, and Diary entry, 10 August 1917 by F. C. Fuller, *Gold Coast Diaries*, 135.

> The effective administration of this Colony, so far as the bulk of the population is concerned, can only be carried on by us through the agency of the native system of tribal government. The people are intensely conservative, and as a whole are greatly attached to their ancient customs and traditions. The influence and power for good of a really able Chief are very great…The native affairs of his district, which mean the management of the people and the development of the resources of the country through the agency of the Chiefs, are at once the most important and the most interesting part of the work of an administrative officer in the Gold Coast….[106]

Governor Clifford's position, widely shared among colonial officials in the Gold Coast, reflected longstanding ideas in imperial ruling circles about the 'tribal' subjects of the British Empire,[107] but he was also articulating a practical policy option for making the colonial project successful in the Gold Coast. The challenges of young men and women to the power of chiefs, in direct and subtle ways, made the colonial state's cultivation of the "agency of the native system of tribal government" imperative. By 1916, when Governor Clifford made his observation there had been many incidents of youth political action that threatened the policy of indirect rule. Throughout the early decade of the 20th century, for instance, the *Asafo* among the coastal Ga people, the indigenes of the colonial city of Accra and its environs, had emerged as the main opposition to colonial policies and initiatives that they considered not to be in the interest of the people. The Ga *Asafo* were particularly averse to Ga chiefs, *mantsemei*, who proved willing in carrying out the policies of colonial state. The Ga *Asafo* set about deposing such chiefs for not

[106] TNA: CO 96/567 Letter from Governor Hugh Clifford, Gold Coast, to the Secretary of State of the Colonies, London, May 26, 1916.

[107] See Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, and Chapter 1.

defending the interests of Ga commoners, the *mambii*, and tradition.[108] Similar *Asafo* action in interior Gold Coast kingdoms, such as Kwahu and Akyem Abuakwa, sought to check the excesses of chiefs empowered by colonial rule and defend the rights and interests of commoners.[109] The potential anti-colonial dimension of the generational politics of youth in the early decades of the 20th century was thus not lost on the Gold Coast colonial administration.

Socio-economic change and youth

The larger context for the generational tensions of the early colonial period was the social and economic changes facilitated by colonial rule. One of the key factors of change was the expanding colonial cash economy, signified by a boom in cocoa production. Cocoa replaced palm oil and rubber as the economic lever of social change in the 20th century.[110] The boom in the production had a profound effect on generational relations in both rural and urban Gold Coast. In his 1916 letter to the Secretary of State for the colonies, Governor Clifford noted the various economic and social changes that impacted generational relations and politics in the Gold Coast. Hitherto, Governor Clifford perceptively observed:

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[108] Osei-Tutu, *Asafoi in the history and politics of Accra,* Chapter 5. Also see John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000).

[109] Simensen, "The Asafo Movement of Akim Abuakwa, Ghana," 25-41; Simensen, "The Asafo of Kwahu, Ghana," 383-406; and, Li, "Asafo and Destoolment," 327-357.

[110] For accounts of the wider impact of cocoa on Ghana since the colonial period see Polly Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana: A study in rural capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), Gwendolyn Mikell, *Cocoa and Chaos in Ghana* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), and Jean-Pierre Chaveau, "Cocoa as innovation: African Initiatives, Local Contexts and Agro-Ecological Conditions in the History of Cocoa Cultivation in West African Forest Lands (c.1850-c.1950)," *Paideuma*, Bd. 43 (1997): 121-142.

> [t]he illiterate native had little chance of acquiring riches, and unless he belonged to one of the ruling families of his tribe, he had very little influence in local affairs. Today the "young men" – who are the third estate in each of these diminutive democratic kingdoms, of which the Gold Coast and Ashanti are an agglomeration – are becoming wealthy… [A] rich "young man" assumes an importance in local community to which his ancestors did not dream of aspiring.

The wealth the colonial governor referred to was the outcome of the boom in cocoa production that the southern part of the colony had witnessed since the early decade of the 1900s.[111] Local initiatives in the cultivation of cocoa, initially spurred by the work of Gold Coaster Tetteh Quarshie and the Basel missionaries in the late 19th century, had started to yield dividends very early in the 20th century. Tetteh Quarshie's cocoa plantation of about 300 trees at Mampong-Akuapem, proved a successful model that generated the interest of farmers in nearby towns in the 1890s. The Basel mission's Botanical Garden established at Aburi soon met the demands of interested farmers for cocoa seedlings. Before long, cocoa farms and plantations were springing up all over the southern part of the colony. This spurred movements of migrant cocoa farmers in search of land to cultivate, which in turn also led to the growth of new settlements and towns. By the early years of the 1900s, cocoa cultivation had spread to Ashanti and the Brong Ahafo areas, beyond the southern parts of the colony.[112] New towns came into being as a result of the boom in cocoa cultivation and trade. As of 1916, when Clifford made his observation, the Gold Coast was one of the leading producers of cocoa in the world. Being largely a local enterprise with little foreign input, the wealth thus generated stayed

[111] TNA: CO 96/567 Governor Hugh Clifford, Gold Coast, to the Secretary of State of the Colonies, London, dated May 26, 1916.

[112] Mikell, *Cocoa and Chaos*, 70-71.

in the family units that provided the capital and labor in the cocoa industry.[113] Significantly, the stranglehold that the traditional local chieftaincies or aristocracies held over economic activities had been broken by now, thus allowing many commoners, as families and individuals, to accumulate wealth and its attendant social prominence and influence. C. H. Harper, the colonial commissioner of the Eastern Province of the Gold Coast, on a tour of duty of the Akwapim area acknowledged that " [t]hanks to the increase in wealth arising from the cultivation of cocoa, there is a spirit of independence spreading about the division" among ordinary people. As a result, the commissioner noted, "the chiefs…will need sympathetic support" because they were "losing influence and prestige."[114] The spirit of independence among commoners, a great source of worry to the chiefs and their colonial-administrator allies, was expressed in political and cultural terms. Gold Coast youths, the 'Third Estate' of Governor Clifford, pursued autonomy in ways that were politically significant: "The 'youngmen' of today…are beginning to acquire the influence which is wont to accompany wealth, and unless this new power is recognized and made use of in time, it may end in destroying the tribal constitution….", Clifford warned.[115] The wealth generated by cocoa production combined with the opportunities for other wage employment in colonial towns and cities, which were actively pursued by the young people, allowed them to challenge the generational

[113] TNA: CO 96/567 Letter from Governor Hugh Clifford, Gold Coast, to the Secretary of State of the Colonies, London, dated May 26, 1916. Also see Gareth Austin, "Vent for surplus or productivity breakthrough? The Ghanaian cocoa take-off, c. 1890-1936," *Economic History Review* 64, no. 4 (2014): 1035-1064.

[114] Diary entry of 4 Feb 1914 by C. H. Harper, Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province, *Gold Coast Diaries*, 82.

[115] TNA: CO 96/567 Letter from Governor Hugh Clifford, Gold Coast, to the Secretary of State of the Colonies, London, dated May 26, 1916.

hierarchies of Gold Coast societies and communities in the early colonial period. An index of these challenges was the increased consumption of alcohol, hitherto controlled by elders and largely for ritual purposes, among young male migrants to urban centers of the colony.[116]

Going along with the economic change was social change particularly in the field of formal education, though the long-term effects of formal education would be most felt in the 1930s and 1940s. The economic and social changes reinforced each other and were particularly important in the way youth related to elders. Education was very important for the social mobility of commoners. By the early 20th century, the efforts of various Christian missions to promote formal education were being consolidated. Kimble notes that conversion to Christianity and the acquisition of formal education were so aligned that new Christian converts were called *sukulfo* (an Akan word meaning people of the school or students). The tentativeness of the initial efforts in the late 19th century was over but progress in the spread of education came slowly but surely. There were seven government elementary schools and 111 missionary schools in the Gold Coast in 1897. By 1902, the number of government schools remained at seven while the mission schools jumped to 117. The increase in the enrolment of pupils was more impressive: from a total of 6,666 pupils enrolled in elementary schools in 1892, the number increased 12,136 by 1902. By 1919, enrolment in all schools had reached about 27, 318.[117] The example of the Kingdom of Asante where the traditional leadership was most resistant to missionary education is instructive. The Asante chiefs were concerned about the long-term effects of

[116] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*.

[117] *Gold Coast Departmental Reports*, Education. Cited in Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 74-78.

the western ideas and practices that missionaries purveyed. The gradual spread of education in Asante, however, reflected the larger situation across the colony even though coastal urban areas, such as Cape Coast and Accra, and parts of the eastern province had a much better record of formal education. By 1905, the Basel missionaries had established 10 schools in Asante with pupil attendance numbering in a few hundreds. The Wesleyan missions also had about seven schools with roughly about the same number of pupils. The number of pupils enrolled in schools was a slight improvement over the previous year's record.[118] Enrollment improved in succeeding years. By the middle of the second decade, the number of schools in Asante had increased. The total number of schools by both missionaries and the government was 44 with a student population of over 2000.[119] Other parts of the colony had seen similar increases in the number of schools and school enrollment. Francis Crowther, the secretary for native affairs, noted in 1915 that there was a demand for more government schools across the colony. Even though chiefs remained concerned about the effects of formal education on youth, many of them were behind the demand for more government schools and viewed the government schools as less subversive in their putative effects than that of mission schools.[120] The provision secondary education also moved apace, though government support was not as forthcoming as the Gold Coast intelligentsia would have liked. By 1919, a few secondary schools had been established in mostly the coastal cities such as Cape Coast and Accra on the initiative of the missions and the private individuals. Under

[118] *Annual Gold Coast Government Departmental Reports*, 1905.

[119] Mikell, *Cocoa and Chaos,* 67.

[120] TNA: CO 96/567 Gold Coast Confidential Report on Native Affairs of 1915 (4 May, 1916).

pressure from the small class of well-educated Gold Coasters, the government accepted the challenge of providing an advance education beyond the elementary. The northern territories of the colony, however, lagged considerably behind the south in the availability of the formal education. Unlike in the south, the colonial government encouraged or allowed missionary educational efforts on a limited basis in the early decades of the 20th century. A few missionary schools were established in northern towns such as Navrongo, Wa and Tamale by the end of the second decade of the 20th century.[121]

The class of literate and semi-literate young people from these schools, who were later to become a more influential political force in the 1930s and beyond,[122] represented social change that was threatening to the chiefs. The modernity to which the young people had been exposed made them an upwardly mobile and restless social group that wanted independence from the control of chiefs and elders. Chiefs in central and southern Gold Coast especially resented the fact that young people who converted to Christianity and received missionary education tended to cut themselves off from their communities. This, the chiefs feared, might encourage a movement that would undermine their power and control over labor.[123] The northern territories of the colony, where progress in formal education lagged behind considerably, were not spared this. A fracas in 1929 involving the chief of the township of Wa and his subjects against some Muslims in the town soon took on a generational dimension. The chief commissioner of the northern territories of

[121] Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 79-87.

[122] See Chapter 3.

[123] *Annual Gold Coast Government Departmental Report*, 1905.

the colony noted in his report on the disturbance that it was largely due to the advance of modernity and "the dissatisfaction of the youngmen with [the] slowness of their advancement."[124] Throughout the late 1920s there was great concern in chiefly circles about how unsettling these young people were to the traditional status quo.[125] In the context of the assault on the chieftaincy institution by the *Asafo* in some of the kingdoms of the Gold Coast, the impact of formal education in empowering youth would compound the concerns of chiefs.

Chiefs also had another reason to be wary of the impact of formal education on youth. The small but growing class of semi-educated youth looked to the older and better-educated group of indigenous Gold Coasters as their social models. Besides being models for the growing class of educated youth, some members of the indigenous intelligentsia also actively cultivated the political awareness of the youth, especially through the Gold Coast press which had a long tradition of providing critical commentary on colonialism and articulating proto-nationalist ideas, dating back to the 19th century. In the words of P.A.V. Ansah, the colonial press "was an advocacy press for whose running what was needed was a commitment to the nationalist cause rather than professional skills in journalism."[126] Joseph Casely-Hayford, a lawyer and an influential member of the intelligentsia, used his position as editor of the *Gold Coast Leader* to urge on the youth.

[124] PRAAD-Tamale, NRG 8/3/15 Blue Book Report 1929-30, 18.

[125] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 Acting Commissioner, Central Province, to the Secretary of Native Affairs, Accra, 31 March 1943.

[126]P.A.V. Ansah, "Mass Media Training and Professionalism," Paper delivered at a workshop on Development, Democracy and the Mass Media in Ghana, University of Ghana, December 8-11, 1980, 2.

In a typical editorial in 1911, Hayford appealed to the "[r]ising generation of youth" to cultivate education and moral values that would help them to successfully wage "the struggle that lies ahead before the country and upon the final issues on which hinge our social, political and national evolution".[127] The recognition of youth as the 'rising generation' and the framing of a socio-political and national struggle to which youth were invited rankled the colonial establishment of officials and chiefs no end.[128] Members of the local intelligentsia had been pressuring the colonial state and the chiefs for reforms that would allow the intelligentsia to play more central roles in colonial society. The appearance of an alliance between the better-educated indigenous intelligentsia and the slowly but steadily growing mass of youth with limited education was a real source of concern to the colonial establishment of chiefs and state officials.

Colonial officials' distrust of the intelligentsia, especially the lawyers among them, was legendary. In 1916, for instance, Governor Clifford indicted the indigenous lawyers as "men who having been educated in Europe returned to batten upon their fellows, and to profit by their innate love of litigation".[129] The distrust the colonial establishment had for the lawyers and other indigenous professionals worsened because of their growing social and political influence on the mass of colonial subjects. The colonial government barred lawyers at different times during the early colonial period from appearing before the

[127] "I am, I can – Appeal to the Rising Generation", *Gold Coast Leader*, Jan 7, 1911, 2. A similar appeal was contained in the newspaper's next edition in an editorial titled "I OUGHT; I WILL – An appeal to the Rising Generation" (*Gold Coast Leader*, Jan 14, 1911). These appeals and exhortations to youth to educate themselves and be politically engaged was very common in the nationalist newspapers of the period.

[128] See Jones-Quartey, *A Summary History of The Ghana Press*; and Jones-Quartey, *History, Politics and Early Press in Ghana.*

[129] TNA: CO 96/567 Letter from Governor Hugh Clifford, Gold Coast, to the Secretary of State of the Colonies, London, May 26, 1916.

native courts. The lawyers tended to argue points of law and draw on legal knowledge that was beyond the scope of the average chief and that in turn undermined the influence and authority of the chief.[130]

The new social group of literate and semi-literate constituted a critical core of the urban migrants as they flocked to the cities for work, educational and cultural opportunities. The urban areas also promised greater independence from the control of elders and chiefs. An example from the Krobo area in the southeast of the colony in 1914 illustrates the trend. In 1914, the chief of western Krobo complained to C. H. Harper, the colonial commissioner of the province under which the chief's district fell, that the young men in his division had refused to join the police service in the district when they were asked by the district commissioner (DC). The chief related that at the meeting with the DC "no young man came forward" to take up the job offer "but [at] night several slipped away, ran to Accra, joined the police and are there still."[131] The youths wanted the job but didn't want to work in their communities and remain under their chief. The allure of Accra, the colonial capital, lay in the independence it assured them. The migration of young people was important in the emergence of some colonial towns. The late 19th century and early 20th century witnessed the establishment of new industries such as mechanized underground mining and railway construction. Some of these industries were sited in areas of the Gold Coast, which necessarily required migrant labour if the industries were to succeed. For instance, railway construction had started in the small Ahanta village of

[130] See Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 532, 535.

[131] Diary entry of 23 January 1914 by C. H. Harper, Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province, *Gold Coast Diaries,* 87.

Sekondi in 1898 on the coast. This attracted a lot of young male migrants to the strenuous construction jobs that were available. In short order, Sekondi burgeoned into a sprawling urban area in the early years of the twentieth century. Obuasi, the gold mining town inland, followed a similar trend. The introduction of mechanized mining by the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation in 1897 drew a constant stream of youth in search of work in the mines of the town.[132] The growth in the cocoa industry also spurred migration to other areas of the colony, which was a source of worry to some chiefs. The *Omanhene* of Akuapem had occasion in 1914 to complain that "there was too much independence" among his subjects because many had migrated to other districts and chiefly divisions and do not pay him allegiance anymore.[133] Accra, the colonial capital on the coast, and Kumasi, the commercial hub and traditional capital of the Ashanti kingdom in the interior of the colony, both of which were already urbanized, continued to expand considerably in the early decades of the 1900s. Jobs and schools made these much older metropolises points of attraction for the migrating youth. However, this was not one-way trend in terms of its influence and ramifications. As Kenneth Little notes, urbanization in West Africa in this period created "a far stretching network of social and other ties between the town and hinterland. It [did] not mean a permanent separation between those who have moved and their rural kin."[134] It is this interaction between the urban and the rural that allowed the effects of the factors of social change to be extended beyond urban areas during the colonial period.

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[132] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, 58-60.

[133] Diary entry of 23 January 1914 by C. H. Harper, Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province, *Gold Coast Diaries*, 81.

[134] Kenneth Little, *West African Urbanization: A Study of Voluntary Associations in Social Change* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 20-21.

The social order that emerged in colonial Ghana in the early decades of the 1900s was a male-focused one, as Gwendolyn Mikell has rightly argued that.[135] The historical record provides more information about young males than females as the activities and movements of the males was a central focus of the state. However, there was a gendered response to the social and economic changes that occurred in the period. Urbanization and migration to urban areas, for instance, provided women with opportunities for financial independence in colonial towns and cities that was largely specific to their gender. Women provided many services to the male working class. They were sellers of alcohol and cooked food, and provided domestic services to men who had migrated without wives. Some also took to prostitution as a way of making money. The money made from these activities allowed women to assert themselves in ways that were hitherto unknown. With the wealth made some women sought to transform gender relations in their favor. They took charge of their own sexuality and redefined the obligations of marriage. This threatened the patriarchal control that elders exercised over women's reproductive and productive abilities. This new assertiveness of women in urban colonial Ghana marked a radical questioning of their longstanding social position as "economic and status goods", as Akyeampong argues.[136] The evidence is not clear for most women in rural areas but there is the indication that some women made wealth

[135] Mikell, *Cocoa and Chaos*, 69.

[136] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 49.

cultivating their own cocoa farms and this helped to alter rural gender relations.[137] The participation of the young women in the dance and music forms evolved in the early colonial period suggests that, like their male counterparts, they found in the burgeoning popular culture opportunities for self-expression and some measure of autonomy, especially in their romantic and sexual relationships with men. This would be especially true of those in the urban areas of the colony.

The early 20th century was therefore a period of social and political changes with important implications for generational and gender relations in the Gold Coast. New wealth-making opportunities for commoners, the spread of schooling and urban migration transformed young peoples' relations with chiefs and elders. Chiefs throughout the colony were wont to complain about the 'pride of the youngmen,' which they wanted to cut to size. One paramount chief's suggestion that the young men's pride should be dealt with by flogging them because it was "the custom of their forefathers" indicated both his desperation and the changing times in which he lived.[138] The reproach of youth against chiefs, glossed as pride, was sometimes expressed in direct political action, such as the Asafo deposition of chiefs, but it also found subtle expression in popular culture and youth leisure activities.

[137] See Mikell, *Cocoa and Chaos*, 67-70 and Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, 48; and Jean Allman, "Rounding Up Spinsters: Gender Chaos and Unmarried Women in Colonial Ashanti," *The Journal of African History* 37, no. 2 (1996): 195-214.

[138] Diary entry of 23 January 1914 by C. H. Harper, Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province, Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Diaries,* 81.

Youth, popular culture and politics

The political import of youth leisure and popular culture was the basis for the considerable attention it received from colonial officials throughout the early 20th century. In fact, the colonial government's interest in the popular cultural activities of the "third estate," to borrow Governor Clifford's designation of the youth in the colony, was long-standing, dating back to the late 19th century. The government's concern rested on the potential of these activities to disturb public order and peace. It also wanted to avoid situations that would undermine the authority of the chiefs, who were badly needed in making possible colonial rule. The popularity of dance and music genres such as*, Adaha, Osibisaba*, and *Ashiko* among youths in colonial towns in the 1890s forced the colonial and traditional authorities to acknowledge their potential as tools of social protest, and they made every effort to suppress them though they failed.[139] *Adaha* ("dance here"), a brass band music style that combined military fife and drum music with local rhythms, was the earliest innovation in the Fante coastal towns. The adoption of adaha music by the Asafo companies of Cape Coast reflected and added to its popularity. Adaha also enjoyed popularity outside of the Asafo setting and was often performed on the outskirts of the towns away from elderly oversight. The dance music soon spread into other parts of the southern Gold Coast with towns that had the means establishing and maintaining an adaha brass band. Osibisaba, a fusion of local percussive styles with the accordion, guitar and harmonies also emerged on the Fante coast and spread inland. Osibisaba used both male and female singers. Ashiko, which shared some similarities with osibisaba, emerged in the colonial capital of Accra, and soon gained popularity in towns further

[139] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, 61.

north of the capital. The popularity of these dance music genres among the young men and women of the colony depended not only on their recreational value; the youths' deployed them as markers of new opportunities for autonomy and their challenges to social hierarchies in the changing context of the colonial rule.[140] It is this fact, which drew the concern of the colonial officials and chiefs who then set about to suppress them starting from the late 19th century.

The concern to suppress youth popular cultural activity had not abated by the early 1900s. Indeed, a certain panic mentality appeared to have developed within chiefly and colonial circles about these new dance musics. The official concerns about the threats of these pillars of the emergent colonial popular culture to social and political order merged with Christian missionary concerns about their adverse effects on the youths' morality. In 1904, the Governor, on the advice of the Executive Council of the government, issued a new order under the Native Customs Ordinance, passed earlier in 1892, to suppress the dance called *Dedewa*, which was reported to be prevalent in the Volta River District and other parts of the eastern province of the colony. The colonial government ordered the suppression of dedewa because it "tend[ed] towards a breach of the peace".[141] C. A. Atiemo, a resident of the Akuapem town of Awukugua where dedewa was said to be prevalent, reported to the town's chief that the dance was customarily held at night and

[140] Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night*, 46-51. Also see Collins, "Ghanaian Highlife"; John Collins, "A Century of Changing Locations in Ghanaian Commercial Popular Entertainment Venues," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, no. 10 (2006-2007): 149-170.
[141] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Governor in Council Order, 21 December 1904.

"all the youngmen in the town meet there; and often commit unlawful crimes (sic)."[142] The 'crimes' that Atiemo alleged involved illicit sexual affairs that sometimes occurred during the nightly performances of dedewa, which he described as a flower dance. The organizers of dedewa sessions were young men. However, the performance of the dance and the enjoyment of its attendant music involved both sexes as participants and observers. In the performance, the young men made passes at the young women. Atiemo in his complaint to the chief of Awukugua harped on the young men's penchant for pursuing young married women in their sexual escapades. Young men and women used the opportunity that dance music such as dedewa provided away from the watchful eyes of elders to identify potential partners and formed romantic relationships. This was quite subversive of the existing social mores and added to the worries of elders about these dances.

Official panic over alleged indecent dances and music among youth would continue throughout the early decade of the 20th century. It would appear that the dances and songs were becoming more expressive of the sexual and romantic playfulness that both young men and women embraced in colonial popular culture and thus challenged gendered and generational expectations. Reports of youth dances known as *pantsitering/patsinkyiren*, *ankademu* ("not stuck in the house/room"), *odo* ("love") and *antekodwo* said to be widely popular in the western and central provinces, and Ashanti, exercised the attention of the government in 1907 and 1908. The colonial secretary instructed commissioners in these regions of the colony to investigate the nature of these dances and how widespread they

[142] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Letter from C. A Atiemo to the Ohene (Chief) of Ewukuguah, 11 October 1904.

were so they could be suppressed. Pantsitering and ankademu appeared to be variants of osibisaba or the same dance music under different names.[143] Both utilized small solo and base drums and involved free-form dancing by both male and female dancers. A colonial report compiled in April 1907 mentioned that in both patsinkyiren and ankademu

> singing accompanies the music [and] the movement of the body and the actions of the performers are of an indecent nature. The whole dance is more or less a sensuous orgie (sic). They usually take place in the open and frequently last all night.[144]

Odo was associated with funerary events or the celebration of the new yam harvest, however, by 1907 when it came to the attention of central government officials it appeared to be undergoing change beyond its original purpose. Two contrasting reports by district colonial officers suggested this change, though both officers agreed there was nothing indecent or immoral about the dance, as the enquiry of the colonial secretary suggested. In April 1907, the commissioner of the central district of Ashanti reported that odo, a dance from the coast, was performed indoors during funerals and a band using an accordion, a concertina and a tambourine played the accompanying music, which was mournful. "The dance is of a respectable and decent nature", he noted.[145] Two months later, his counterpart of the western district of Ashanti reported that odo was known in his district as a dance for children and it tended to "evoke much merriment on the part of

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[143] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Letter from Colonial Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, 19th March 1907; Colonial Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, 17 May 1907; PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Letter from Colonial Secretary to Acting Commissioner of Ashanti, 30th March 1908. Also see Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night*, 59.

[144] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Report respecting native dances known as Pantsitering, Akademu and Odo, 2 April 1907; PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Letter from Commissioner, Western District of Ashanti, to Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, 3 June 1907.

[145] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Letter and Report from the Commissioner, Central District of Ashanti, to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, 2 April 1907.

girls and boys" when performed during the yam festival. In the course of the dance, "some young girl on a certain word being said to her opens her cloth for a few seconds" and then moves away.[146] The colonial officers may well have been describing two different dance styles but the elements of their reports were suggestive of the broad changes in popular culture in the rural interior of the colony occasioned by the spread of the dance and music styles from the urban areas of the coast. The use of modern instruments such as concertinas, accordions and tambourines were features of subversive dance musics like osibisaba and ashiko. The circular movement of young men and women between urban and rural areas facilitated the spread of these music styles and their adaptations in varying contexts. This produced variants such as the *Densu* dance music, prevalent in Ashanti, which also used a concertina, two large drums and a small one, and was described by colonial officials as "immoral as the others."[147]

The colonial state actively encouraged and supported traditional authorities in the suppression of these popular cultural forms. This strategy reflected a failure in the official high-handed approach in dealing with the situation and also sought to maintain the view that customary practices, the so-called native practices, properly belonged to the realm of chiefs and elders and should be regulated by them. The latter position was one of the main artifices of the policy of indirect rule and it served the power interests of both the

[146] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Letter from the Commissioner, Western District of Ashanti, to Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, 3 June 1907.

[147] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Report respecting native dances known as Pantsitering, Akademu and Odo, 2 April 1907.

state and the ethnic authorities that the state relied on to control the colonial subjects.[148] A good example of the state's failure to control and suppress youth popular cultural activity could be seen in the flourishing prevalence of the dance and music genres of osibisaba and ashiko throughout the early decade of the 1900s in colonial towns and cities, more than a decade after they had officially been banned. Accra, the colonial capital, was one of the settings of the bustling revival of osibisaba and ashiko. The youth of Accra who took to the enjoyment of these dances were reported by the police to use them as "means of conveying insults to companies and individuals which might easily be the means of producing a disturbance." The government sought the collaboration of the *Ga Mantse* (king of the Ga people), Tackie Obiri, and the chiefs of the other townships of Accra to suppress them in 1909. The secretary for native affairs' reasons for relying on chiefly orders and not a government proclamation in the suppression were quite revealing:

> I do not wish to recommend to His Excellency [the governor] the suppression of these dances by proclamation. For one it would not be creditable to an important town like this to let it be known that such a public action was necessary and for another reason, it would not be difficult for other persons who wished to do so, to introduce similar practices into other dances, which would necessitate another proclamation.[149]

The official approach of controlling youth leisure and popular culture through proclamations and ordinances had obviously proven ineffective. It, indeed, had the

[148] See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) on the institutional expression of colonial rule as a bifurcated state in which European jurisprudence was applied in urban Africa while in rural areas a "customary mode" of governance [decentralized despotism] was encouraged through state-created and/or supported tribal authorities.

[149] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Takki Obiri, Ga Manche, Accra, 19 January 1909 and PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Letter from Secretary for Native Affairs to Noi Ababio, Osu Manche, 19 January 1909.

potential of encouraging the tendency among the youth to turn their recreation into a site of politics. Colonial officials also lacked the social knowledge and register to keep up with the proliferation of the new dance and music styles in the colony. The terrain of youth popular culture had become difficult for the colonial state to track and police, and officials looked to their ruling allies, the chiefs, to do the policing.[150] The chiefs and elders were all too willing to step in as this youth activity represented challenges to their power and a transformation of local politics. The *Ga Mantse* and other chiefs in the Accra readily issued orders banning *Osibisaba* and *Ashiko* as well as other dance forms in which "similar immoral songs are used".[151] The chiefly orders and by-laws, however, failed to effectively suppress these dances.

Throughout the second and third decades of the 20th century this trend of youth action and official reaction in popular culture continued. Youth created new musical and dance forms or modified old ones not only for recreation but also to critique power and express their autonomy. Some dance and music genres were known only in specific areas of the colony while others were colony-wide. *Aloha* gained popularity among the youth in Accra and its environs in 1924. This dance and music form, in which male and female participants embraced together, appeared to have been made popular by a band, which traveled in the greater Accra area performing at night. The recently installed Ga Mantse, Tackie Yaoboi, who sought the government's support to ban Aloha, argued that the

[150] See Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night*, 59.

[151] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Letter from Ga Mantse, Tackie Obiri, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Accra, 8 February 1909. Also see PRAAD ADM 11/1/884 Letter from Ga Mantse to Secretary for Native Affairs, Accra, 22 January 1909.

performance of the dance did not "give a purity of training that the Gold Coast is inculcating into the minds of its Children." He was particularly worried that the dance organizers had initially received a pass from colonial officials to perform aloha every night.[152] Two other dances in the late 1920s that attracted official suppression efforts illustrate the modifications youth made to existing dance and music styles and contexts. In 1928, *Agbugbunte*, the youth-dominated revelry that was part of the annual Homowo festival of the La people of Accra, drew the attention of colonial officials and missionaries. In its original traditional context, participants in the agbugbunte revelry sang and stumped or danced in celebration of the Kpa deity of the La people during the festival. The young men and women of La altered this traditionally sanctioned revelry into a space for intimate social mixing and possible romantic and sexual encounters. The dance movements in agbugbunte, of concern to officials and missionaries alike, involved men and women holding each other in close embrace and "performing grossly obscene gestures and motions."[153] In 1929, a similar concern was expressed about the popularity of another dance, *Egbanegba* ("It can break – We don't care if it breaks"), in the trans-Volta region of the Gold Coast. Egbanegba was a dance and music style involving heavy drumming, male and female singers and dancers, and dance movements in the center of a circle formed by the participants. When it first came to the attention of the colonial government in 1928, there was no official concern about its impropriety as the secretary for native affairs had witnessed it being performed at the courtyard of the chief of Ve-

[152] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Letter from Ga Mantse, Nii Tackie Yaoboi, to the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Accra, 9 June 1924.

[153] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Letter from Secretary for Native Affairs to Rev. A.W. Wilkie, Christiansborg, 9 October 1928; Letter from Secretary of the Scottish Mission, Gold Coast Colony, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Accra, 11 October 1928.

Deme in the Ho district.[154] However, in the following year the colonial government made enquiries about the dance with the view to suppress it. The Catholic Bishop in the area, Augustine Herman, complained that egbanegba was "danced publicly by a special gang of young men nearly everyday." He acknowledge the failure of previous attempts to suppress it but urged the government to make extra efforts as suppression for "[i]t is the interest of the Government to form a healthy people, but I am myself witnessing how the children of some villages are all spoilt by those awful dances…. People who are old all condemn it."[155] The Bishop's Christian sensibilities about the dance found common cause with some elders in the area to have egbanegba suppressed.

The colonial establishment of chiefs and officials deemed youth popular culture as 'immoral', 'indecent' or 'objectionable' largely because it questioned political, generational and gender norms rather than moral norms. In fact, colonial officials sometimes quietly admitted that there was nothing immoral about the dances of which traditional elders complained. In the first decade of the century when there was widespread official concern about the spread of *Pantsitering*, *Odo* and *Ankademu* throughout the colony, a district commissioner concluded that none of those dances was

[154] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Note on Egbanegba by S. K. Kudjonu, Junior Clerk, Office of the Secretary for Native Affairs, 26 March 1928. The translation of the Ewe word "Egbanegba" provided in the dissertation text is taken directly from the above-mentioned colonial report. The writer of the report, S. K. Kudjonu, an indigene of the Ho district and a native speaker of Ewe, suggests in his report that the "it" in question was the drum played during the performance of the dance. Private communication with native speakers of Ewe in the course of research indicates that the actual word is "egba ne gba", which roughly translates as "by hook or crook [we will dance today and damn the consequences] or today is the day [when we dance and damn the consequences], all of which is suggestive of acting/dancing in defiance in spite of the consequences – Kudjonu's "We don't fear if it breaks."

[155] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Extract of letter from Bishop Aug. Herman, 18 January 1929 [extract is from a personal letter to the new district commissioner? to the area].

"sufficiently obnoxious to require a stop being put to [them]".[156] The commissioner of the southern district of Ashanti also observed that *Ankademu* was just a local pastime for youth and "there is nothing as regards the alleged indecency of it".[157] Colonial officialdom, however, acknowledged that what was really being contested by the youth through dance and music was the power and control of chiefs and elders, which was so important for the success colonial governance. Undermining the chiefs was to undo indirect rule. This required of the colonial state to shore up the authority of the chiefs and elders. By the 1920s, when indirect rule became more interventionist, the chiefs received the full backing of the state even if there was little or no evidence to back their complaints about youth indecency. In the 1926 dance 'scare' when the chiefs and elders of Manya Krobo banned *Atsai* and *Kasakpe* dances for being "impious and rather abominable," the secretary for native affairs admitted in a confidential memo that he had

> been unable to find from other sources any evidence of this dance being of an immoral character or even its being known outside the Manya Krobo division; but the question of dances seems to me to be one that is best determined by local opinion. Chiefs should be supported in their efforts to suppress such dances and songs as appear to them indecent…[158]

The indecency that the Krobo chiefs and others in that period worried about was of a political kind. It served the needs of colonial governance and the power and authority of

[156] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Commissioner of Western District of Ashanti to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, Sunyani, 3 June 1907.

[157] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/15 Commissioner of Southern District of Ashanti to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, Obuase, 6 April 1906.

[158] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 11/1/884 Memorandum by Secretary for Native Affairs to the Colonial Secretary, Accra, 26 November 1926.

chiefs and elders to collaborate in criminalizing and suppressing the dance and music forms that colonial youths created in the early colonial period.

Conclusion

In the early decades of colonial rule, the young men and women of the Gold Coast used popular culture and recreation to challenge social hierarchies and undermine generational and gendered expectations. Young people created new styles of dance and music that they used to signal their quest for independence and mark the opportunities and transformations engendered by colonial rule. The new dance musics such as osibisaba, ashiko, aloha, atsai and kasakpe drew on pre-existing African recreational music and dance styles, and European and other popular cultural resources. The new dance musics originated in urban areas on the coast of the colony and soon spread inland and became part of a larger vibrant popular culture whose pillars were bars, drinking clubs, live band music and popular theatre.[159] The critical popular culture dominated by youth was also connected in its generational politics to the social protests of the Asafo who roamed the countryside removing from power many of the chiefs in this period. The colonial government and the chiefs recognized the subversive nature of these new popular cultural forms and set about suppression thus turning dance and music in the early colonial period into a site of generational, gendered, and anti-colonial popular politics. The critiques of colonial power that could be found in youth pop culture of the early decades of the 20th century would lay the foundation for the nexus of generational politics and anti-colonialism that was purveyed by the many youth associations that came into being in the

[159] See Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*.

1930s and early 1940s. The political significance of youth pop culture in the early decades of the 20th century also presaged the anti-colonial mix of popular culture and mass nationalism that was witnessed in the post-Second World War era.

Chapter 3

"And still the Youth are coming": Generational politics and anti-colonialism in Ghana, c. 1930-1957

In May 1937, the Hamburg-based newspaper, the *Negro Worker*, a subsidiary of the Communist International (Comintern), carried a report on an association of youths in the colony of the Gold Coast known as the West African Youth League (WAYL). The newspaper, which had a strong tradition of covering African nationalist activities and was circulated in West Africa, reported that the long trial for sedition of the WAYL's radical leader, I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, in the Gold Coast had a salutary effect on the youth association:

> For ere the third stage of the trial of the Organizing Secretary [of the WAYL, Wallace-Johnson,] at the West African Court of Appeal was over in December 1936, the membership of the League had swollen to over seven thousand with a total number of 28 branches scattered all over the country…and reports since received from the Gold Coast Headquarters, give a further increase of about a thousand more new enrolments with an additional 10 new branches. And still the Youth are coming.[160]

The *Negro Worker* could well have exaggerated the growing number of the WAYL's membership and was wont to report enthusiastically about the association, given its long-standing relationship with Wallace-Johnson.[161] However, the newspaper report's exultant

[160] TNA: CO 96/740/3 *Negro Worker*, May 1937.

[161] See Leo Spitzer and LaRay Denzer, "I.TA. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6, no. 3 (1973): 413-452. Wallace-Johnson worked for the *Negro Worker* in the early 1930s and served on its editorial board in 1933. Spitzer and Denzer suggest that Wallace-Johnson's trial may have earned him considerable sympathy among Gold Coast youth and therefore increased the membership of the WAYL but the number of new members was not as high as suggested by the *Negro Worker*. Furthermore, the membership of the WAYL declined after Wallace-Johnson left for London to appeal his conviction in February 1937 because he was not around to rally youth to join the association with his charisma.

punch line, "And still the Youth are coming", accurately expressed an important characteristic of the burgeoning radical politics of the 1930s in the colony, which was that young people were showing a growing interest in establishing or joining youth associations that were oriented towards politics. This interest made for an increasingly vibrant political associational life in which there was a growing nexus of generational politics and anti-colonial nationalism. Wallace-Johnson and the WAYL were iconic of that nexus in the 1930s. Many other youth associations also emerged in that period, and collectively they defined and shaped anti-colonialism in the Gold Coast through to the colony's decolonization in the late 1950s.

Historians of Africa have observed that the 1930s could have been Africa's period of decolonization but for the Second World War. Some particularly cite African reaction to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 as an event that could have launched African decolonization. Adu Boahen, for instance, argues that the outrage caused by the invasion in Africa and her diaspora was such that "but for the outbreak of the Second World War, the revolution for independence would have been launched in the late thirties rather than in the late."[162] Due to this missed potential, the historiography of African anti-colonial nationalism tends to privilege the post-Second World War period. The post-war period is interpreted as marking a decidedly new phase in the anti-colonial struggle. The literature focuses on the radical and popular nationalism in the post-war period that superseded the

[162] A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins university Press, 1987), 92. Also see Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History* 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), 60.

conservative and elite one before the war.[163] The privileging of post-war nationalism has drawn attention to how anti-colonial groups had to mobilize across gender and generational lines in order to rally and maintain the support of the masses.[164] For Ghana, as Dennis Austin typically argues, it was in the post-war era of mass nationalism that the independence movement became a national and a social struggle: a dual-fold struggle as much against colonial rule as it was against the rule of tribal chiefs and elders who had come to be dependent on the colonial state for their power in the system of Indirect Rule.[165] In this interpretation, it was the post-war nationalist struggle that brought on to the political stage new forces such as youths who were hitherto excluded from power.

However, the origins of the social fissures that gave rise to the generation-inflected anti-chief and anti-colonial politics of Ghana lay in the pre-1945 period. In this chapter, I argue that it was in the period from the late 1920s to the early 1940s, the long 1930s, as it were, that anti-colonialism in the Gold Coast was firmly shaped as a nationalist and a social struggle, with the politics cast in generational terms. Youth as a rubric and style of anti-colonial nationalist politics acquired its essential character in the pre-Second World War period and thus embedded generational politics as a motive force in the broader

[163] See Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past before the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Rooney, *Kwame Nkrumah*; Austin, *Politics in Ghana*; Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*; and, Davidson, *Modern Africa*; and, John D. Hargreaves, *Decolonization in Africa*, 2nd edition (New York: Longman Publishing, 1996).

[164] For representative work that examines generation and gender in post-1945 African nationalism, see Straker, *Youth, Nationalism, and the Guinean Revolution*; Burgess, "Remembering Youth: Generation in Revolutionary Zanzibar," *Africa Today*, 46, 2 (1999): 29-50; Allman, "The Youngmen and the Porcupine," 263-279; Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997); Jean Allman, "The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe: Nationalism, Feminism and the Tyrannies of History," *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 13-35.

[165] Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, 26-30.

nationalism of colonial Ghana. Though young people had been present in the popular politics of the colony prior to the 1930s, the tradition of youth politics would become transformative in important new ways from that period onwards. Youths drew on existing styles and practices of protest and politicking, but they also brought into popular politics new tactics, ideas, discourses and language that set the tone and defined anti-imperialism from the pre-Second World War period through the final phase of Ghana's independence struggle in the late 1950s. Focusing on the long 1930s accounts for the roots of mass nationalism and expand our historical vision in terms of the dissolution of British Empire. The post-1945 period therefore was a dramatic epilogue, albeit an important one, to decolonization in Ghana.

Four historical developments in the long 1930s provided the cause and context for the forging of the nexus between generational politics and anti-colonial nationalism. These developments were the greater incorporation of the chiefs and elders of the various ethnic groups in the colony into colonial governance; the expansion in formal education and increase in the number of educated youth in the colony who were open to radical nationalist messages; the emergence of associations, which drew on local and international currents of thought, practices and events to channel youth political consciousness into anti-colonial nationalism; and the impact of the global economic depression of the 1930s. This chapter examines the interplay among these historical developments in shaping generational politics and anti-colonialism in colonial Ghana from the long 1930s, and their long-term impact in the post-WW II nationalist struggle leading up to independence in 1957.

"Powers exceeding those which [they] possessed under Native Custom": Chiefs and Indirect rule in the inter-war years

One of the critical colonial developments in the inter-war years was the increasing incorporation of the chiefs and elders of the various ethnic groups in the colony into colonial governance. This was the era that the African colonial state as a bifurcated state, in the language of Mahmood Mamdani, reached full maturity as indirect rule, as policy and practice, was employed to firm up chiefly rule in furtherance of colonial governance.[166] By the late 1920s, colonial officials were showing greater appreciation for the theories and practice of indirect rule.[167] The earlier non-interventionist application of the indirect rule policy had given way to the interventionist phase. In this phase, colonial officials made more active attempts at restructuring and re-engineering chiefly rule to service the ends of colonial administration. The colony's chiefs fully embraced the colonial government's legislations and reforms since they put them in a position of power against the small class of well-educated indigenous professionals who demanded that they, rather than the chiefs, be the political intermediaries between the state and the colonial subjects. The colonial government preferred the chiefs to the indigenous professional class due to the professionals' criticisms of and opposition to colonial policies.[168]

A raft of new constitutional and legislative reforms signaled the colonial government's preference and bolstered the power of the chiefs. The 1925 constitution of colonial

[166] Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 77-82.

[167] Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, 23.

[168] Gocking, "Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast," 425-434.

governor Gordon Guggisberg increased the number of seats occupied by the chiefs on the expanded colonial Legislative Council from three to six while the number of the local intelligentsia remained at three. The chiefs who were to serve on this new council were to be elected by the newly created provincial councils of chiefs, a superstructure for chiefly interaction, deliberation and decision-making that privileged the voices of these traditional authority-holders. The establishment of provincial councils of chiefs marked an attempt to give a colony-wide structure and functionality to chieftaincy. The Native Administration Ordinance of 1927 further boosted the powers of senior chiefs and was enthusiastically supported by them. [169] The ordinance also sought to formalize the establishment of treasuries by the various native authorities, as the chiefs and their advisory and executive councils of local elders were called.[170] While there was a concern in official colonial circles in the immediate pre-Second World War years about the need to streamline chieftaincy into an efficient administrative tool in the light of some chiefs abusing their power, colonial officials had no doubts about continuing their ruling alliance with the chiefs. The 1935 Native Authority Act further consolidated the relationship between central government and the existing native authorities, established new ones, and gave them wide powers of local government to be supervised by district and provincial commissioners.[171]

[169] Gocking, "Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast", 435.

[170] Austin, *Politics in Ghana,* 23.

[171] Gocking, "Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast".

All these legislative and administrative changes made chiefs and their councils of elders beholden to the colonial government but increasingly detached from the concerns of their subjects, a source of discontent for ordinary people. The discontent took on a generational turn as clusters of youth, especially graduates of the colony's primary and secondary schools, championed commoner concerns and discontent against chiefs throughout the colony and sometimes sought to remove from power those chiefs they deemed unresponsive to their subjects. [172] In effect, the high point of indirect rule as a policy of colonial administration in the 1930s also marked the beginning of its decline as it generated widespread opposition. Though the colonial government acknowledged the discontent against chiefs among the youth, it rather sought to strengthen and streamline the chiefly institution. Thus when Governor Alan Burns introduced his reforms of the indirect rule system in the early 1940s, he aimed to invest chiefs with "considerable powers exceeding those which chiefs possessed under Native Custom" and thus making it impossible "for a handful of malcontents to paralyse the activities of a [traditional] State."[173] Colonial government officials deemed tradition and custom, the purported domain and field of activity for tribal chiefs and elders, and an ordered colonial society, the ultimate aim of colonial governance, inseparable. In the interwar years and beyond this meant the tendency on the part of the colonial state and chiefs to re-engineer 'custom' to achieve the ends of colonial governance. This was especially so as the wind of anti-colonialism that blew around the collaboration of chiefs and colonial officials became so radical and strident. One factor reinforced the other: the continuing

[172] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 Memo to Secretary for Native Affairs on relations between Divisional Councils and their young men, 9 March 1943.

[173] Alan Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1949), 203-4.

collaboration between chiefs and the colonial government encouraged the radical and strident anti-colonialism of young people, which in turn made the indirect rule arrangement more appealing to the authority holders, that is, both the chiefs and the colonial state officials.

Expansion in formal education and the generation of school-leavers

The socio-political formation of youth whose challenges to chiefs and the colonial state defined anti-colonial nationalism in the colony owed its existence to the expansion of primary and secondary education in the colony dating back to late 1920s and 1930s, at the same time that indirect rule was being consolidated. The expansion was the result of an empire-wide policy of increasing African access to primary and secondary education. Under the new policy, African colonial governments were to join Christian missionary societies, who traditionally dominated the field of formal education, in establishing and managing schools with an emphasis on moral training and improving the standards of lives of Africans.[174] In the Gold Coast, the educational reforms of Governor Gordon Guggisberg in the late 1920s signaled the government's interest in expanding education across the colony. The colonial state saw this as necessary to help Africans deal with the social changes that had been engendered by colonial rule.[175] The educational expansion efforts of the colonial state and the Christian missionaries would be complemented in

[174] Lord Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), 1229-1233.

[175] Jeremy Pool, "Education Reform and the Dilemmas of Rule in the Gold Coast, Africa, 1920-1951", paper presented at Southeastern Regional Seminar in African Studies (SERSAS), Georgia State University, 22-23 March, 2002. Accessed online July 4, 2013 (http://www.ecu.edu/african/sersas/Papers/PoolJeremySpring2002.htm).

1930s and 1940s by local communities, which increasingly had come to appreciate the benefits of literacy and numeracy in the colonial order and demanded more educational facilities. As Lord Hailey established in his survey, many native administrations contributed to formal education in their areas by raising funds for schools or managing their own schools. By the mid-1930s, some native authorities in the Gold Coast had taken over responsibility for government schools and many others planned to establish their own schools. This was both a reflection of increased African interest in education as well as cuts to colonial budgets as a result of the Great Depression.[176] The number of young Gold Coasters with basic education and secondary education therefore increased considerably. In the spotty statistics of the Gold Coast government, over 60,000 colonial youth were reckoned to be receiving some form of formal education in 1935. This figure is to be compared to a few thousands in the early part of the 20th century.[177]

The policy of educational expansion was to emphasize vocational and agricultural training in primary school education. This emphasis was central to the Guggisberg education expansion, for instance. The rational behind the provision of vocational and agricultural education was to communicate the importance of practical skills for the economic development of the Gold Coast and to avoid the situation of producing a class of potentially unemployed young people who desired to have only white-collar employment.[178] However, the older missionary schools' emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic had generated a preference for literary education among the youth. In 1938, for

[176] Davidson, *Modern Africa*, 52-54.

[177] Lord Hailey, *African Survey*, 1239-1241, 1308.

[178] Pool, "Education Reform and the Dilemmas of Rule in the Gold Coast."

instance, a large Gold Coast mission school sought for funds in England to support its annual production of a Greek play, which was performed in the original Greek.[179] The Board of Education of the Northern Territories of the colony acknowledged the relative lack of interest in agricultural training when it complained in 1938 that the colony's basic education program had failed to generate in youth an interest in agriculture and was rather "producing restless, rootless and discontented young men who lacked local ties and despised their own parents."[180] These school graduates had aspirations for a non-agrarian life and chafed at local chiefly and elderly control. These elementary and secondary school-leavers would become the 'malcontents' and 'agitators' who haunted chiefly and colonial officialdom's imagination and reality.[181]

In the imagination of colonial officials, the 'malcontents' were male youths. This gendered construction of the challenges to chiefly rule is reflected in the references to "the youngmen"[182] in official records. As Richard Waller notes, under colonialism, the image of youth became gendered. Youth was often thought of as males and this imposed different conceptions of deviant young males and females. Young males were seen to be potentially violent and criminal, and a potential threat to socio-political order, while females were said to be 'loose'. Female sexuality received particular attention and both

[179] Lord Hailey, *African Survey*, 1245.

[180] PRAAD-Tamale, NRG 8/9/1 Minutes of the Northern Territories Board of Education, 9 March 1938.

[181] See Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant*, 203-204.

[182] This was the spelling most used in official documents. See, for instance, PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 Memo to Secretary for Native Affairs on relations between Divisional Councils and their youngmen, 9 March 1943.

the colonial state and tribal elders sought to curtail and control it.[183] Jean Allman documents the practice in the inter-war years in Ashanti and other parts of the Gold Coast of chiefs and elders ordering unmarried maidens above 15 years to find husbands or be jailed. These episodes of rounding up spinsters, Allman points out, was part of changing gender relations, which though was "articulated in the language of a moral crisis, in terms that spoke of women's uncontrollability, of prostitution and venereal disease, was, more than anything, about shifting power relationships."[184] Scholars of gender and colonialism in Africa, Allman observes, have argued that the 'problem of women' when articulated by chiefs was often a reflection of patriarchal concerns about changes in rights in women's labour, property rights and generational relations. Factors such as urbanization, formal education, Christian missionary activity and women's involvement in the colonial cash economy facilitated women's assertions of independence and whittled away at the control male elders and chiefs had over them.[185] These tribal patriarchs thus sought to use the powers granted them under Indirect Rule to hold women in check. So even when female youths fell outside of the immediate purview of the colonial state in terms of their political salience, they were as interested as their male counterparts in curbing the power and undermining the control of chiefs and elders. Many young women thwarted or resisted the designs of their social elders in subtle but significant ways. Some resisted the attempts to marry them off, or turned the chiefs' rounding up of spinsters into a game;[186]

[183] Waller, "Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa." 77-92.

[184] Allman, "Rounding Up Spinsters, 195-197. Also see Jean Allman, "Of 'spinsters,' 'concubines', and 'wicked women'": reflections on gender and social change in colonial Asante," *Gender and History* 3, no. 2 (1991): 176-189.

[185] Allman, "Rounding up Spinsters," 207-213.

[186] See Allman, "Rounding up Spinsters."

others moved into colonial towns and cities in search of work opportunities and education, and would become part of the growing mass of politically active youth. Individual women and groups would play critical roles alongside the male youths in the associational life that crystallized and channeled youth anti-colonial nationalism in the Gold Coast.[187]

The generation of school graduates in the long 1930s, contrary to the arguments of Austin and others,[188] began cohering as a political formation even before the end of the Second World War. By the early 1940s, colonial officials had taken note of the situation and gave considerable attention to the whys and wherefores of troubling relations between the chiefs and youths of the colony. A conference of colonial officials in 1943 in the interior city of Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti kingdom, gave considerable attention to the situation. A follow-up conversation in official colonial circles started by Governor Alan Burns' solicitation of the views of provincial commissioners about "rebellious youth deman[ding] a hearing" from their chiefs revealed how much educated youth had become central to the building up of anti-chief and anti-colonial sentiments.[189] The commissioner of the Central Province of the colony wrote that much of the disquiet between youths and chiefs was due to the latter's reluctance to give a hearing to the concerns of the former or their representatives. The commissioner noted the reasons for the reluctance of the chiefs:

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[187] Edzodzinam Tsikata, "Women's Political Organizations, 1951-1987," in, *The State, development and politics in Ghana*, eds. Emmanuel Hansen and Kwame A. Ninsin (London: CODESRIA, 1989), 73-93.

[188] Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, 13-14, and Richard Rathbone, "Businessmen in Politics: Party Struggle in Ghana, 1949-57," *Journal of Development Studies*, 9, 3 (1973): 391-401.

[189] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 Memo to Secretary for Native Affairs on relations between Divisional Councils and their young men, 9 March 1943.

> Chiefs are jealous of their positions and powers[,] and many are afraid that these may be undermined, particularly by young and progressive elements within their States and Divisions. Then again many Chiefs are illiterate and they have a constant distrust of educated men, the majority of whom are young men owing to the expansion of education in the last quarter of a century.

In the experience of the commissioner, distrust and discontent with chiefs was widespread among the people but "the young men are always the most vociferous" in the expression of this discontent.[190] Other provincial commissioners concurred with this view. The commissioner of the Western Province opined that the political tensions between youths and chiefs could be dealt with only when "the Chiefs and their Councilors are ready to admit onto their councils the non-traditional educated element".[191] The 'non-traditional educated element' was the growing mass of young people with no connections to chiefly families that had and were acquiring formal education. The Eastern Province's commissioner observed that in most of the traditional states in his province "the terms 'young men' and 'literate classes' [were] rapidly becoming synonimous (sic)…[T]he 'young men' are becoming increasingly literate." The attempt by government-supported chiefs and elders to silence this group in matters of public importance was the source of political tension.[192]

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[190] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 Letter from Acting Commissioner, Central Province, Cape Coast, to Secretary for Native Affairs, Accra, 31 March 1943.

[191] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 Western Province Commissioner to Secretary for Native Affairs, 16 April 1943.

[192] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 Eastern Province Commissioner to Secretary for Native Affairs, 18 May 1943.

A few colonial officials insisted that there was a difference between the opinions of the educated youth element and that of the general public but that distinction only served to acknowledge the increasing voice of the youth.[193] There was a growing overlap between educated youth opinion and that of the general public. The interests of commoners were not adequately represented in the indirect rule system, and youths of the colony were in the vanguard to correct that situation.[194] As Richard Rathbone puts it, 'youth' implied a claim to speak for the mass of colonial subjects but it also reflected a younger generation's attempts to distinguish themselves from the rule of chiefs and elders who had the support of the colonial government.[195] That the colonial government was concerned about finding a proper outlet for the growing assertiveness of the young men, an outlet that would not dismantle the colonial establishment, evidenced the growing importance of youth political activism.

Colonial officialdom's use of labels such as the "educated classes" and "literate classes" was quite apt in rendering officially legible and in a meaningful way the new group of youthful literate and semi-literate colonial subjects who were increasingly looking to have a voice in colonial affairs. Within that social formation there was some variation. There was the relatively small group who had secondary or, to a limited extent, post-secondary education, and worked in various capacities at junior levels of the colonial

[193] See PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 P. H. Canham, Acting District Commissioner, Bekwai, to the Chief Provincial Commissioner, Kumasi, 19 June 1943.

[194] See PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 Letter from Acting Commissioner, Central Province, to Secretary for Native Affairs, 31 March 1943, and the entire set in that file titled "Relations between Divisional Chiefs and their youngmen, 1943."

[195] Rathbone, *Nkrumah and The Chiefs*, 23-24.

public and civil services, and in the private sector as teachers, clerks, shop managers and assistants. The majority of the educated classes were however the mass of basic school graduates who either aspired to further their education or just did any odd jobs available in order to make a living. Though literacy skills varied within the educated classes, the experience of formal education served to aid their cohesion as a generational cohort and formation. The acquisition of formal education, no matter how limited, predisposed them to an emergent order in which literacy skills were privileged above any other. The boarding school system, which was common in secondary and post-secondary education in the colony, facilitated the formation of national consciousness as students from different parts of the colony hitherto unknown to one another met in these schools and now imagined themselves as belonging to a single political community.[196] The colonial state privileged the boarding school system as the most effective means for character training.[197] Education also had the value of encouraging the youth to have an alternative vision of society. They began to question the gerontocratic ideals and vision of chiefs and elders.[198]

The basic and secondary school graduates looked to the older and better-educated indigenous intelligentsia as social and political models. The relationship between the two groups was further worked out in the many youth associations that sprang up all over the colony. The educated youth constituted the majority of the membership of the plethora of

[196] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 114-140.

[197] Lord Hailey, *An African Survey*, 1229.

[198] See PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/2/29/28 Relations between Divisional Chiefs and their youngmen, 1943.

these associations in urban Gold Coast. They were also the founders of youth associations of various stripes and persuasions in the rural areas.[199] Associational life became a strong pillar in the emergent youth culture of the colonial period. It was central in the fashioning of the nexus of generational politics and anti-colonialism that characterized youth politics through to the era of independence.

Associational life and youth politics

While youth associations were not new in the Gold Coast by the 1930s,[200] it was from that period that youth associational life became geared more towards anti-colonial nationalist politics. These associations belonged to a larger field of literary, social and development groups that nurtured the youth's adaptation of the various forms of colonial modernity.[201] For the intelligentsia, youth association politics offered an alternative set of anti-colonial politics that could be used to critique both the chiefs and the colonial administration. The intelligentsia found allies in the young people who were the products of the educational expansion of the late 1920s and 1930s.[202] The associations allowed youths to cultivate a greater voice in colonial public affairs while the associations also served as leadership training mechanisms for them.[203] The associations offered critiques of colonial power and purveyed discourses that sought to re-define the terms of the

[199] Dennis Austin, "The Working Committee of the United Gold Coast Convention," *Journal of African History*, 2, 2 (1961), 275.

[200] Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 146-151.

[201] See Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: 'How to play the game of life'* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 27-52 and Little, *West African Urbanization*.

[202] Austin, "The Working Committee of the United Gold Coast Convention," 275.

[203] Little, *West African Urbanization*, 103.

relationship between government and people in the colony, as well as advocated different political futures for the colony's subjects than that envisaged by the colonial government. Their ideas, discourses and political practices constituted the fount on which future nationalist groups like the Kwame Nkrumah-led Convention People's Party drew in the post-war phase of the struggle for independence. Many youth associations were formed in urban and rural Ghana but the signal associations of the 1930s were the Gold Coast Youth Conference (GCYC) and the West African Youth League (WAYL). The formation and activities of these two associations set the general tone and trends in youth popular politics.

The Gold Coast Youth Conference was formed in the 1929 with the aim of a colony-wide youth movement. Its formation was inspired by the resolutions of the World Youth Peace Conference, held in Holland in August 1928.[204] The Holland conference of about 500 youth delegates from around the world supported global peace, the freedoms and rights of oppressed people, and encouraged practical cooperation among the nations of the world. The conference also expressed unanimous opposition to imperialism and racial inequalities.[205] A Gold Coast delegate at the Holland conference, J. W. de Graft Johnson, communicated its ideas and resolutions to his brother, J. C. de Graft Johnson, at home in the colony and together with friends and colleagues, including Dr. J. B Danquah, they

[204] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/175 *Acts of the Youth Conference* I, no. 3, Sept. 1938, 2. (The *Acts* gave the venue of the World Youth Peace Conference as England but every other information provided in it clearly indicates that the conference in question was rather the World Youth Peace Conference, held in Holland in 1928).
[205] William David Angel, ed., "Resolutions of the World Youth Peace Conference, Eerde, Overijsel, Holland, August 17-26, 1928", in *The International Law of Youth Rights: Source Documents and Commentary* (The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1995), 96.

formed the GCYC.[206] Some of the founding and prominent members of the GCYC were the members of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) and other older Gold Coast associations. They brought their accumulated experiences and membership of the pre-existing associations to the activities of the GCYC. Danquah, as the general secretary of the GCYC, would become its leading light and the GCYC was associated with him throughout its existence into the 1940s. Gradually but steadily branches of the Youth Conference were set up in the major towns and cities of the colony including the colonial capital, Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast, Sekondi and Saltpond among others. The GCYC also successfully co-opted many existing youth groups; it became an amalgamation of various unions, clubs, social and literary groups.[207] The orientation of the GCYC to be an umbrella organization for various youth groups speaks to one of the transformations in youth politics that came into being from the 1930s: attempts at building a colony-wide coalition that marked hesitant but concrete steps towards a national movement.

The GCYC's most active period was in 1930-31, 1937-38 and 1942 when it held a series of conferences that galvanized youth political opinion. The first major conference of the GCYC was in Accra, on the campus of Achimota School, a government secondary and post-secondary school, in 1930. The next major conference of the group was in 1938 on the campus of the Wesleyan mission-controlled Mfantsipim School in Cape Coast. The leadership of the group spent 1937 reviving the association, expanding its membership

[206] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/175 *Acts of the Youth Conference* I, no. 3, Sept. 1938, 2.

[207] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/175 *Acts of the Youth Conference* I, no. 3, Sept. 1938, 6. Also see Little, *West African Urbanization*, 109.

and preparing for the conference. Nineteen thirty-nine witnessed another major conference organized at the Wesley Teachers' Training College in Kumasi. The choice of location for the conferences of the GCYC reflected the group's target membership: secondary and post-secondary educated youth who could be foot-soldiers for the national movement the association for which the association was aiming. The leadership of the association definitely made much of hosting their 1939 conference at the Wesley Teachers' Training College by identifying with both the college's mandate of training teachers for the colony and for Methodism's dogged proselytizing. In its newsletter, it declared:

> Let us be confident of this. That the inspiration and courage that enabled Methodism to penetrate so far into the hearts of the people of this country as to make the name of Wesley a household word will guide and hearten Youth in pursuit of a goal not dissimilar to what Methodism the world over has before it: to let men see in their own hearts that the power to save them is within them.[208]

This was a call for national salvation by the youth of the Gold Coast and an indirect critique of colonial rule as the externally driven apparatus that won't bring the expected national awakening. The association made attempts at establishing a national fund to finance various initiatives in education, health and other sectors of Gold Coast life.[209] The group also sponsored the composition of a national anthem that would help in the "work of national regeneration of the Gold Coast people".[210] These nationalist ideas and programs would receive full expression and become insistent at the 1942 conference organized by the GCYC to which all youth organizations in the colony were invited. The

[208] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/175 *Acts of the Youth Conference* I, no. 6, December 1938, 1.

[209] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/175 *Acts of the Youth Conference* I, no. 3, Sept. 1938, 3.

[210] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/175, *Acts of the Youth Conference* I, no. 6, Dec. 1938, 5.

conference revealed the maturation of nationalist ideas within youth associational circles about the economic development of the country. Discourse in press about the conference also revealed the higher degree of political coherence and nationalist consciousness that associational life had generated among youth in the Gold Coast.[211]

The other notable group, illustrative of the 1930s youth politics, was the West African Youth League. It was set up in June 1935. Like GCYC, the WAYL also had an international dimension in its origins, and perhaps more so. Its founder, I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson, originally from Sierra Leone, had travelled in international communist circles since the late 1920s and lived in London, Hamburg, Paris and Moscow among others. He honed his anti-colonial journalism by working for the *Negro Worker*, the newspaper of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), part of the Communist Third International (COMINTERN). Wallace-Johnson was present at the seminal July 1930 conference of the ITUCNW held in Hamburg, Germany, and his involvement with the newspaper followed immediately after. He also developed considerable experience in trade union organizing. Wallace-Johnson's experience with international communism and the deployment of the skills acquired in his international travels in the Gold Coast, would lead one scholar to wrongly assert that Johnson was the first to introduce "the wholly new and strange concept" of communism into the country, and even perhaps into West Africa.[212] Others preceded Wallace-Johnson and therefore

[211] See, for instance, "Wanted – Freedom to make mistakes: Gbedemah Speaks for Youth," *The Gold Coast Observer*, 20 November 1942, 403; T. M. Mercer, "Youth and Nation," *The Gold Coast Observer*, 20 November 1942, 408, and "National Fund," *The Gold Coast Observer*, 20 November 1942, 408.

[212] Jones-Quartey, *Summary History*, 23.

what he brought was neither wholly new nor strange.[213] However, he soon established himself as "an agitator and leader of exceptional ability" in trade union and youth political activities in the Gold Coast, where he stayed from late 1933 to 1937.[214]

Wallace-Johnson and the WAYL channeled and transformed youth politics in the interwar years. The activities of the WAYL among Gold Coast's youth compelled the colony's governor at the time, Sir Arnold Hodson, to complain to his superiors in London that Wallace-Johnson was "doing a certain amount of harm by getting hold of the young men of [the Gold Coast] for his 'Youth League'". The governor correctly read the WAYL's radical nationalism but he put it down to the influence of Bolshevism.[215] LaRay Denzer and Leo Spitzer observe that WAYL was militant and through its protest discourse "envisioned the beginnings of a movement towards emancipation…[that aimed] to instill feelings of self-determination among colonial subjects." It also sought to lay a "foundation for National Independence".[216] The protest discourse of the WAYL only partly reflected the leftist leanings of its leaders. The protest and nationalist

[213] See, for instance, RGASPI, fond 534/7/74, pp. 20, 30, 53, 62 Letters from Benjamin Wuta-Ofei, editor of *The Gold Coast Spectator*, to George Padmore, editor of the *Negro Worker*, 7 October 1931 to 28 May 1932 (Moscow Archives. Copy of letters received from historian Holger Weiss). These letters clearly indicate Wuta-Ofei's interest in and publication of communist-inspired material in the Gold Coast through his newspaper. He probably was a member of a committee of communists in the colony that had to work secretly because of the colonial government's monitoring and prosecution of those it deemed were involved in Bolshevik-inspired activities. Also see Holger Weiss, "Kweku Bankole Awoonor Renner, Anglophone West African Intellectuals and the Comintern Connection: A tentative outline (Part 1, 9/2007) and Part 2, 10/2007 (Comintern Working Paper, Abo Akademi University, Finland); and, Holger Weiss*, Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[214] Spitzer and Denzer, *Wallace-Johnson* (1), 422; Also see 419-445.

[215] TNA: CO 96/731/1 Letter from Sir Arnold Hodson to Sir Cecil Bottomley, Assistant Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 January 1936.

[216] Spitzer and Denzer, *Wallace-Johnson*, 434-435.

discourse of the Youth League was really forged in the crucible of the generational politics of youth that had been heating in the Gold Coast even before the arrival of Wallace-Johnson. The WAYL was only part of a larger political space which most of the youth organizations in the colony shared.

The international origin of the ideational inspiration for the GCYC and the WAYL illustrates the extent to which many youth associations of the Gold Coast, particularly from the 1930s, drew on international currents of thought and action for their activities in the Gold Coast. Many of these associations drew particularly on either the liberal-international language of self-determination that had come into being following the First World War or the competing critique of imperialism that the Soviet Union and international communism championed.[217] The Gold Coast youth movement consistently remained attuned to these international currents through to Independence in the late 1950s.

Events such as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 and the failure of Britain and other European powers to hold Italy in check would be used by some of the youth associations to mobilize and channel anti-colonial discontent among the youth of the colony. The invasion caused widespread outrage across the continent. Sentiments in colonial Ghana against the invasion were best captured in the dramatic assertion of *Vox Populi*, a local nationalist newspaper: "What we would like to impress on the inhabitants

[217] See Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, 77-78. For an account of the influence of post-WWI ideas of self-determination on anti-colonial and nationalist movements in the colonized world see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-colonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

of this country is that war with Abyssinia is our war."[218] Wallace-Johnson's Youth League was in the forefront to whip up anti-colonial sentiments among youth in the colony. Articulating the position that Italian aggression in Ethiopia was evidence of "the extreme harshness of imperialism and colonialism and of the inhuman practices of the so-called 'civilized' Europeans," the Youth League mobilized a broad countrywide coalition of groups and individuals in opposition to Italy and European imperialism. Wallace-Johnson drew on his trade union activism to form an Ethiopian Defence Committee made up of the Youth League and worker groups such as the Carpenters' Union, the Gold Coast Motor Car Union, the Gold Coast Workers' Protection Association, and mine workers. Through protests, rallies, meetings and petitions against the invasion and imperialism, the League was able to generate considerable anti-colonial feeling in the colony. Membership of the Youth League also increased considerably throughout the colony as a result of the campaign against invasion. About twenty new branches of the League were set up in colonial towns and cities as a result of this campaign. It was due to the effectiveness of the campaign in generating anti-colonial sentiments that the Gold Coast government made every effort to curb the influence of Wallace-Johnson and his League.[219] When Gov. Hodson complained to his London superiors in 1936 about Wallace-Johnson spreading Bolshevism among Gold Coast youths, he (the Governor)

[218] *Vox Populi*, 9 October 1935. Quoted in J. Ayodele Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

[219] S. K. B. Asante, "I.T.A Wallace Johnson and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 7, no. 4 (June 1975), 633-637.

was articulating how effective the Youth League had been in mobilizing anti-colonialism in the colony over the Italo-Ethiopian crisis.[220]

The Global Depression of the 1930s

The developments of the 1930s in relation to youth politics occurred against the background of the global economic depression. The depression had a direct impact on the forging of the nexus between generational politics of youth and anti-colonialism. John Hargreaves observes that the depression caused the "first great shocks" to colonialism in Africa. Widespread unemployment, income losses, reduction in colonial investments, and the fall in the price of cash crops such as cocoa, all of which were effects of the depression, bred colonial discontent. The colonial government's attempts to increase taxes to meet the costs of administration using stool treasuries faced widespread. Some chiefs demurred at the attempt to use them to collect more taxes; those who supported the government's new taxation and fiscal policy faced protests from the *Asafo* in rural Ghana. Cocoa farmers, disenchanted at the low prices that expatriate firms paid for their cocoa, denounced chiefs who supported the new government taxes and fiscal program. The majority of educated and semi-educated youth who flocked into colonial towns and cities in the depression period in search of paid employment and better lives had their dreams largely unfulfilled. They lived in squalid conditions in overcrowded slums of urban Gold Coast. These conditions coupled with the increased prices of goods forced many to endure a precarious existence. The colonial government expressed a lot of concern in this

[220] TNA: CO 96/731/1 Letter from Sir Arnold Hodson to Sir Cecil Bottomley, Assistant Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 January 1936.

period about the problems of urbanization.[221] That the dreams of many youths remained unfulfilled due to the hard economic times fed into their self-awareness as a generational class and also accounted for their politics. Many of these youths would be the ready recruits for groups such as the West African Youth League, which cultivated youth disenchantment into anti-colonial grievances.[222]

Discourses of youth

The youth movement, through newspapers and other texts, also spread nationalist ideas and encouraged colony-wide conversations around issues affecting colonial Ghanaians. These discourses were blueprints, theories and guides for the emergent political radicalism of the period and they also ushered in forms of modernist politicking – in terms of language, styles and ideas – that shaped the generation-informed politics of the 1930s to the Independence era. They, indeed, provided an ideational fount for the post-war Independence struggle. To be sure, the well-educated and older intelligentsia in the youth movement produced most of these texts but the ideas and colonial critiques contained in them influenced the generality of the members of the youth associations and beyond. Pieter Boele vans Hensbroek, who has given scholarly attention to the political discourses and thought of the Gold Coast youth movement of the 1930s and 1940s, observes that the "radical and personal expressions of the *angry young men* of the educated class…were probably the most influential political texts in the period "

[221] Hargreaves, *Decolonization in Africa*, 33-44; and Jeffrey Ahlman, "A New Type of Citizen: Youth, Gender, and Generation in Ghanaian Builders Brigade," *Journal of African History* 53, no. 1 (March 2012), 88.

[222] A. Adu Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Accra: Sankofa Publishers, 2000), 144.

[emphasis in the original]. They represented "a transition to a more standard political conception oriented to the nation-state".[223] The proto-nationalist arguments of the earlier generation was honed and made more insistent in these discourses. They also forcefully inscribed the generational struggle in the anti-colonial nationalist movement.

In the 1930s Gold Coast, the journalism and other writings of Nnamdi Azikiwe, originally from Nigeria, and ITA Wallace-Johnson were exemplary of these discourses. At a reception in Lagos celebrating Azikiwe's departure for the Gold Coast to work as editor of the *African Morning Post*, he titled his speech "The Revolt of African Youth".[224] He thus started his journalistic endeavor in the Gold Coast in November 1934, at the age of 30, ready to contribute to the generational and colonial politics of the period. This informed his choice of a very youthful team of editorial assistants including K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, who had just completed the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Grammar School in Sierra Leone, as assistant editor for sports, and Adolphus Kofi Blankson, a graduate of a secondary school in the Gold Coast coastal town of Sekondi, as a proofreader.[225] Through the pages of the *African Morning Post*, he promoted the philosophy of a *New Africa,* a generation-inflected collection of ideas about ending colonial rule and regenerating Africa socially and politically. The *New Africa* marked an era, Azikiwe opined, when "the connection between Old Age, wisdom and position of

[223] Pieter Boele vans Hensbroek, *African Political Philosophy, 1860-1995: An inquiry into families of discourse* (published dissertation, Center for Development Studies, University of Groningen, 1998), 78-83. A modified form of this work appeared in a commercial edition titled *Political Discourses in African Thought: 1860 to the Present* (New York: Praegar, 1999).

[224] K. A. B Jones- Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1965), 116.

[225] Nnamdi Azikiwe, *My Odyssey: An Autobiography* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1970), 255.

rule, was discarded".[226] The *New Africa* was to be the outcome of social, economic, political and spiritual reforms championed by youth. The idea of the *New Africa* was of a piece with Azikiwe's attitude to chiefs, whom he thought had become less useful to their communities. The institution of chieftaincy, he argued, had to go or be severely reformed. Jones-Quartey, who also became his biographer, observes that in Azikiwe's thought, chiefs

> and the calcified conditions of yesterday which surrounded them, constituted the *Old Africa*…. '[T]he Old Africa must be destroyed because it is in death grips with the New Africa'. The New Africa, on the other hand, meant 'the Africa of tomorrow…It is the Renascence of Africans and the reformation of African society[227]

This was a philosophy for all of colonized Africa but it was very much forged in the crucible of the generational and anti-colonial politics of the 1930s Gold Coast. Azikiwe offered a fully-fledged philosophical treatise on this generational politics in his pamphlet *Renascent Africa*, which was published in 1937.[228]

Illustrative of Azikiwe's anti-chief and anti-colonial politics was the *Morning Post*'s criticisms of elite Africans, especially chiefs, who accepted colonial honors such as knighthoods. The newspaper's attitude on this matter was very much in line with the anti-chief and generational politics of the youth in the 1930s. Chiefly collaborators of the colonial project were wont to be rewarded with knighthoods. The only knighted chief in the Gold Coast between 1934 and 1937, when Azikiwe edited the *Morning Post*, was

[226] Hensbroek, *African Political Philosophy*, 82.

[227] Jones-Quartey, *Azikiwe*, 116-119.

[228] Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa* (Accra: The Author, 1937).

Nana Sir Ofori Atta, paramount chief of Akyem Abuakwa and a conservative voice on colonial legislative and chiefly councils. The *Morning Post* therefore had Nana Ofori Atta and the example he set for other chiefs in its sights when it made it a policy to criticize Africans who accepted honors from the imperial power. The generational politics implicated in these attacks were not lost on the chiefs. Azikiwe observed that the anti-chief discourse bred resentment and some chiefs "publicly denounced [him] as inciting the youths of the Gold Coast against their elders."[229] The anti-chief sentiment remained a strong platform of youth politics through the 1940s. This had a strong appeal and influence on the future champions of youth anti-colonial politics like Kwame Nkrumah who made contact with Azikiwe, and through Azikiwe's guide and support ended up studying in the US, at Azikiwe's alma mater of Lincoln College in Pennsylvania.[230] In his autobiography, Nkrumah acknowledged how his "nationalism was …revived" in the 1930s through the journalism of Nnamdi Azikiwe. Personal contacts between the two were to impress further the young Nkrumah, who was then in his mid-20s. Equally influential on the burgeoning political youth of the 1930s and 1940s was the work of Wallace-Johnson through his journalism and the WAYL. His strident anti-imperial essay 'Has the African A God' which was published in the *African Morning Post* in 1936, brought him legal trouble under the just-promulgated laws of sedition but it was seen by the Nkrumahs of Gold Coast society as the rouser of nationalism, "the first warning puff of smoke that a fire had been lit, a fire that would prove impossible to

[229] Azikiwe, *Autobiography*, 257.

[230] Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: International Publishers, 1971 [1957]). Similarly, Jones-Quartey, the young editorial assistant and future biographer of Azikiwe, also went to Lincoln College on the advice and support of Azikiwe. On his return to the Gold Coast, he maintained a sustained interest in the press and politics as an academic.

extinguish".[231] Ideas of the kind that Azikiwe and Wallace-Johnson espoused would be sustained throughout the 1940s and thus helped to the make the extinguishing of the lit fire impossible. The period around the 1942 major gathering of the Gold Coast Youth Conference, for instance, witnessed an efflorescence of discourses that expressed both the generational politics of youth and their were nationalist aspirations.[232] A series of unforeseen, and for the politics of youth, fortuitous events especially in the late 1940s would make the political fire lit by the discourses of people such as Wallace-Johnson and Azikiwe in the 1930s truly impossible to extinguish.

A dramatic epilogue: 1948 and its aftermath

In May 1948, a columnist in the *Gold Coast Observer*, called 'Reflectionist', sent out a plea:

> Let the Chiefs and commoners come together…The commoners are the ***young men*** in the sense politically known in the Gold Coast …[L]et the spiritual leadership of the Chiefs be recognized…Let the Chiefs be proud of their young men who have drunk deep at the Pierian Spring, and who are prepared through constitutional means to serve their country to lift up its status. [Emphasis in original] [233]

The columnist's plea alluded to the tensions and conflict between youths, the radical spokesmen and exponents of commoner interests, and chiefs, allies of the colonial administration. The columnist's note of the "young men who have drunk deep at the Pieran Spring", the fount of knowledge in Greek mythology, was an acknowledgement of

[231] Nkrumah, *Autobiography*, 22-23.

[232] See, for instance, "Wanted – Freedom to make mistakes: Gbedemah Speaks for Youth," *The Gold Coast Observer*, 20 November 1942, 403; T. M. Mercer, "Youth and Nation," *The Gold Coast Observer*, 20 November 1942, 408, and "National Fund," *The Gold Coast Observer*, 20 November 1942, 408.

[233] Reflectionist, "Let there be no strife," *The Gold Coast Observer*, May 7 1948.

the significance of the educated youth in the ongoing anti-colonial drama. 'Reflectionist' feared that the social struggle between the chiefs and the youth would adversely affect the nationalist drive for independence as the colonial government could use the tensions as an excuse to postpone plans for decolonization. The immediate cause of the columnist's plea, however, was the series of anti-colonial events – riots in major colonial towns and student strikes in the coastal city of Cape Coast – that had occurred in the early months of that year. These clearly had a generational dimension to them. The long-standing generational politics had become fully embedded in the wider nationalist struggle for independence by this time. The events of 1948 deepened the merger of generational politics and anti-colonial nationalism and would precipitate the final phase of decolonization in Ghana.

The riots in late February and March of 1948 were precipitated by the shooting deaths and injuries of veterans of the Second World War who marched on the seat of the colonial government in the capital, Accra, protesting their post-war conditions. The march, meant to be a peaceful one, was to present a petition to the governor demanding that the British government fulfills its promise of jobs and pensions to members of the Gold Coast Regiment that fought on the side of Great Britain and the Allies during the Second World War. The British head of police at the seat of government, Superintendent Colin Imray, shot into the marching ex-soldiers following their refusal to stop on his orders. This resulted in the deaths of Sergeant C. F. Adjetey, Corporal Attipoe and Private Odartey Lamptey as well as the injuries of several other ex-servicemen. In response, there were riots in Accra in which the mob attacked European and Asian owned

businesses. The rioting soon spread to other cities and major towns in the colony including Kumasi.

The pattern of the attacks of the rioters clearly indicated that the shooting incident of February 28 was one of many grievances that had informed the riots. The inflated prices of European and Asian stores, against whom there had been a boycott starting in January, and cocoa farmers' dissatisfaction with the government's method of dealing with the devastating swollen shoot disease spreading through cocoa farms in the colony among other socio-economic grievances all combined to fuel the riots.[234] The government's committee of inquiry into the riots, headed by Queen's Councillor (QC) Aitken Watson, fully acknowledged the multiple sources, some remote others immediate, of the riots.[235]

The youths of the colony played central roles in the riots and this was by design. In a confidential diary report compiled after the riot, the senior commissioner of the Kumasi district acknowledged the broader socio-economic concerns that informed the riots in Kumasi and singled out the role played by a young political stalwart, Krobo Edusei, and his cohort of unemployed Ashanti youth in effectively enforcing the boycott of goods and encouraging the riots that followed. The commissioner observed that "[i]n Kumasi the bulk of the rioters appeared also to be young unemployed Ashantis" and added:

> In the early stages the main hostility was directed against the Firms [expatriate businesses, mostly European and

[234] See Rooney, *Vision and Tragedy*; Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Culture*; and, Austin, *Politics in Ghana*.

[235] *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into disturbances in the Gold Coast* (London: Colonial Office, 1948). The commission is better known by its informal name, the Watson Commission.

> Asian owned] and both Government and the Native Authorities lost considerable prestige for apparently failing to urge action in the settlement of the matter….This loss of prestige encouraged the belief that the present form of Government had ceased to exist and in some places led gangs of young men to repudiate all authority and settle by violence their political disputes.[236]

The disturbances of February and March fed into and catalyzed the anti-chief and anti-colonial politics of youth in Kumasi and its districts: the riots were a fortuitous occasion for the violent resolution of generational political differences. In Accra and other places where rioting took place, the situation was no different. Emmanuel Akyeampong avers from the evidence that "the young men were …the active catalysts" of the riots of February 1948.[237]

The riots were a stimulus for long-term changes in the politics of the colony but they were not the only set of events in 1948 that embodied the nexus of generational and anti-colonial politics. Not long after the riots of February 1948, a spate of student strikes took place in secondary schools in the old coastal city of Cape Coast between the 13th to the 20th of March. The strikes were most serious at Mfantsipim School, Saint Augustine's College and Adisadel College, the leading and elite secondary schools in Cape Coast and, indeed, the whole of the colony. The striking students apparently acted in solidarity with the jailing of the 'Big Six' – Kwame Nkrumah, J. B. Danquah, Ako Adjei, Obetsebi Lamptey, William Ofori Atta, and Edward Akuffo Addo – the leading nationalist leaders

[236] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/1/251/4 Confidential Diary of Acting Senior District Commissioner, Kumasi District, 29 March 1948.

[237] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, 122; Also see his entire account of the riots from 120-124.

in the colony at the time for allegedly instigating the riots.[238] These nationalists belonged to the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). The government closed down the schools and sent the students home to await the findings of an investigation into the strikes. The governor called a conference involving colonial officials, members of the local intelligentsia and chiefs to discuss the strikes and make recommendations to deal with future strikes. The conference convened in mid-May in Accra under the chairmanship of a local judge, S. O Quashie-Idun .[239]

The report of the conference, a veritable statement of conservatism in the Gold Coast at the time, was however very perceptive in its reading of the ferment of political radicalization of youth which constituted the larger context of the student strikes. The report's identification of the causes and effects of this radicalization brought to the fore the key elements that informed and reinforced youth anticolonial politics. The conference pointed to various factors as accounting for the strikes. It identified the "intemperate writing in the local newspapers [that] has had a deplorable effect upon the youth of the Gold Coast". It also mentioned 'political agitators' who had been addressing students on school campuses and spreading their political ideas among them. Furthermore, it noted the formation of student political clubs and associations in schools. The report specifically mentioned the "United Students Convention" (taking after the fashion of the nationalist United Gold Coast Convention) and "other such union of pupils with stated aims of a presumptuous political nature." The students were also encouraged by some

[238] Nkrumah, *Autobiography*, 89-90.

[239] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/13/45 *Report of A Conference on the Cape Coast Secondary Schools*, no. V (Accra: Government of the Gold Coast, 1948).

teachers, "most of [whom] are young", who, according to the conference report, were serving external political interests. To these immediate causes of the strike, the report added a local tradition of student strikes in Cape Coast that went all the way back to the 1930s.[240] This local tradition of student strikes recalled, for instance, the student strike in 1935 in Mfantsipim School, which was led by the school prefect, Joe Appiah. The strike started as students' expression of grievances over the quality of food and racial abuses against them by the wife of the school's British principal but it soon became a cause for anti-colonialists. The nationalist Kobina Sekyi and Nnamdi Azikiwe, then editor of the *Morning Post*, used the occasion of the strikes to support the students and chastise the colonial authorities. Joe Appiah reckoned this event as one of the formative moments in his political socialization in his youth. He reckoned it as the "first shot in the revolution to come".[241] Appiah would go on to be a key player in Ghanaian nationalism before and after independence. The conference was therefore right in noting the tradition of student strikes as both a catalyst and an expression of the radical politics of youth, which had come to a head in the early months of 1948. Every relevant site for the political socialization of young people, including schools, had been radicalized by the anti-colonial politics of the youth. The students who were sent home following the strikes also spread the nationalist message wherever the found themselves. The colonial authorities in

[240] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/13/45 Report of Conference on the Cape Coast Secondary Schools, No. V., 1948. For a detailed reconstruction of the 1948 student strikes in Cape Coast, see Pool, "Now is the time of Youth, 101-111. Though every element of his brilliant analysis of the strikes suggests otherwise, Pool asserts that the strikes in and of themselves were not politically significant. They were not the cause of the development of anti-colonial nationalism, as indeed that process had started much earlier, but they reflected the spread of anti-colonial nationalism in youth spaces (thought to be immuned against such) and in turn further galvanized the anti-colonial drive.

[241] Joe Appiah, *The Autobiography of An African Patriot* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1996), 92. See pp. 77-99 for his account of the 1935 strike.

Kumasi, for instance became alarmed when the students who had returned home from the schools in Cape Coast decided to form an association to discuss politics.

A key witness of the period, Kofi Batsa, who would soon become a prominent journalist and partisan of the nationalist Convention People's Party (CPP) recalled that a youth movement and a student movement acted in tandem as an anticolonial force at this point in time. The distinction between the two movements turned only on membership.[242] The student movement centered on those who were still in the secondary schools while the youth movement embraced the larger body of youth, educated, semi-educated or non-literate who flocked to and were the foot-soldiers of the nationalist anti-colonialism that had spread in the colony. The events of 1948 were to consolidate this alliance further.

Another fallout of the students' strike was the wedge it drove between future Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and the youth wing of the UGCC, on one hand, and the other members of the leadership of the party, on the other hand. Indeed, this would be the major precipitant for the transformation of the Committee of Youth Organization (CYO), the youth wing of the UGCC, into the nucleus of the Convention People's Party (CPP) in 1949. Following the recommendation of the conference on the strikes, the authorities of the concerned Cape Coast secondary schools expelled many students as well as some teachers for their participation in the strike.[243] The UGCC disagreed with the findings of

[242] Kofi Batsa, *The Spark: Times behind me: From Kwame Nkrumah to Hilla Limann* (London: R. Collings, 1985).

[243] PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 1/13/45 *Report of a Conference on the Cape Coast Secondary Schools.* Not all the recommendations of the conference were accepted or implemented by the schools' authorities. The conference recommended that no sixth formers, all of whom were initially dismissed immediately after the strikes, should be re-admitted. The authorities of the schools decided instead to admit all of them with the

the conference, arguing that the conference was one-sided in its deliberations as it considered no other evidence except the reports presented to it by the principals of the secondary schools. Most importantly, the UGCC announced it has plans for "alternatives" so that "no student will be deprived of the opportunity to complete his studies in a normal manner". Given the dominance of the mission churches in the provision of secondary school education, the UGCC's alternatives was to include "a National College to be established at an early date and preliminary steps are already in hand towards that ultimate goal".[244] When Nkrumah, as the general secretary, took steps to make good on this promise by the UGCC, the other leaders accused him of not consulting them on the idea. This and other charges, including the formation of the CYO, against Nkrumah would drive him more into the embrace of the youth of the independence movement. The CYO started life as a youth study group created within the UGCC by Nkrumah. Existing groups like the Ashanti Youth Association (or some of its members) and the Ghana Youth Association of Sekondi joined the youth study group to become the nucleus of the CYO.[245] In time the CYO drew heavily on other youth associations and clubs and that reflected the degree to which youth associational life had become a site for anti-colonial nationalism. The CYO would become the spearhead of the anti-colonial youth movement while the intelligentsia leadership of the UGCC sought allies among the chiefs of the colony.

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exception of ringleaders, prefects and others known to have committed offenses during the period of the strikes that would otherwise have led to their expulsion. See *The Gold Coast Observer*, June 25, 1948.

[244] "The United Gold Coast and the Educational Situation," *The Gold Coast Observer*, June 25, 1948.

[245] Nkrumah, *Autobiography*, 89-96.

In late December 1948, a CYO-sponsored gathering to which all youth groups in the Gold Coast were invited met in Kumasi as the Ghana Youth Conference. Though the conference was banned by the colonial government for fear of breaches of the peace, the conference participants met in secret and out of their deliberation produced the a youth manifesto titled "Towards Self-Government".[246] This gave substance to the youth movement's rallying cry for "Self-Government Now", the slogan that would rhetorically mark the split between the youth wing of the UGCC and its leadership, which wanted "Self-Government in the shortest possible time". The formation in June 1949 of the Convention People's Party (CPP) completed the split of the CYO from the UGCC [247] and was the beginning of the triumphant journey of the party of youths and indeed of the common people of the Gold Coast to independence by the late 1950s.

The organizational heft of the CYO and its eventual metamorphosis, the CPP, rested heavily on its ability to mobilize across generational and gender lines, a task to which individual women and groups brought their mobilization skills. Throughout the colonial period women had constructed their own social associational spaces in the form of credit unions, benevolent and mutual aid clubs, voluntary associations and market women's associations while at the same time they actively participated in the political associations. Women such as Hannah Kudjoe, Akua Asabea Ayisi, Letitia Quaye, Mabel Dove and Ama Nkrumah stand out among these women.[248] Some of these women who played

[246] Nkrumah, *Autobiography*, 98-99.

[247] See Nkrumah, *Autobiography*, 88-109, and Austin, "The Working Committee of the UGCC," 273-297, for the drama of the final break and the immediate events surrounding the formation of the CPP.

[248] Tsikata, "Women's political organization," and Manuh, "Women and their Organizations," 106-108.

important roles in Ghana's nationalist struggle, especially for the CPP, belonged to the generation that received elementary school education in the long 1930s and their activism reflected their social and political formation starting from that period. Hannah Kudjoe, "the leading woman nationalist in post-World War II Ghana," was the quintessential exemplar of that generation. Born in 1918 in the coastal town of Busia, Hannah received primary education in the late 1920s and 1930s. She then received vocational training as a seamstress. She got married briefly to J. C. Kudjoe of the Abontiako Mines in the town of Tarkwa, a political hotbed. She moved to stay with her brother in the same town and plied her trade as a seamstress. It was through her brother that in 1947 she met Kwame Nkrumah, who had just returned from studying abroad in the US and Britain to take up his position as the general secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention. Hannah utilized the social node she occupied as a seamstress to campaign for the nationalist movement. Her organizational and political skills would be critical to the founding of the Committee of Youth Organization of the UGCC, which became the founding nucleus of the Convention People's Party. She also helped to found the women's wing of the CPP and together with women such as Letitia Quaye, Sophia Doku, and Ama Nkrumah travelled throughout the country rallying support and organizing the CPP as its propaganda secretaries.[249]

Following the success of the CPP at the national elections organized in 1951, Kwame Nkrumah was invited to form a government as leader of government business, a

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[249] Jean Allman, "The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe: Nationalism, Feminisms, and the Tyrannies of History," *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 3 (2009), 16-17. Also see A. B. Chinbuah, "Heroes of our time: Hannah Kudjoe – Freedom fighter and social worker," *Daily Graphic*, 30 November 2007, 11.

designation which was shortly thereafter changed to Prime Minister. The success of the CPP in the elections of 1951, 1954 and 1956, which ultimately led to the establishment of full independence in 1957 under CPP control owed much to the party's popularity among a large section of the country's youth. To be sure, the party relied on the support of key segments of Gold Coast society – farmers, market women, and workers among others – but the footwork of political activism was done by the party's youth. Kwame Nkrumah acknowledged this in a recall of the nationalist struggle:

> By forming the Convention People's Party…[a]n intense campaign was carried on through out the length and breadth of the country and soon, with the tireless enthusiasm of young people and the ready cooperation of the masses, the party colours, red, white and green, could be seen flying on rough wooden poles, in the most remote of villages.[250]

Conclusion

The struggle that led to the decolonization of Ghana in 1957 was the product of a nexus of generational politics and anti-colonialism whose origins lay in the 1930s. The iconic forms, which this generation-inflected anti-colonial politics took in the post-1945 period are meaningful only in the context of this longer history. The formation of the Convention People's Party in the late 1940s and its triumphant journey of leading colonial Ghana to independence in 1957 represented a maturation of the rising political consciousness and activism of colonial youths in the preceding period. "And still the Youth are coming", the triumphant claim of the *Negro Worker* about the radicalization of

[250] PRAAD-Accra, ADM 16/14, Kwame Nkrumah, *History of A Great Party: Birth of My Party* (undated manuscript; it was excerpted from his autobiography, *Ghana: Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (1957), 100-108).

Gold Coast youth through associational life in 1937 would ring true in 1957 as Gold Coast youth, through political association, successfully merged their struggles against chiefs and elders, on one hand, and the colonial state, on the other hand, to bring about the decolonization of the colony.

Chapter 4

"We shall be outspoken": The CPP Government, Higher Education and Student Political Activism, c.1957-1966

In May 1964, when confrontations between Ghana's first post-independent government, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, and the country's universities were at its peak, the student magazine of Commonwealth Hall of the University of Ghana, the *Echo*, raised a cry of defiance against the government. In an editorial titled, "WE SHALL BE OUTSPOKEN," the magazine asserted that

> in keeping with tradition, the "Echo" will spare no effort to echo the voices of Legon beyond the hills, and to mirror your [the students'] images in the interest of mutual understanding between the university and the people. We shall continue to be outspoken on matters, which concern our universities; and on any issue which is relevant to the momentous African revolution. We shall be fearless in putting forward our glorious socialist revolution because it is our ardent belief that we live in a country, where every citizen can breathe the air of freedom and look upon the common light of day.

The immediate occasion for this defiant leader was a scheduled change in the editorial management of the periodical in which, as the magazine put it, "a band of gallant youths, having excelled themselves in the field, leave the front to give way to another band."[251] The obvious target of this student militancy was the government of Nkrumah and the ruling Convention People's Party (CPP). The CPP government had had a running conflict with university authorities and students over the purpose of higher education, university autonomy, academic freedom, nationalism, and student political activism throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. The situation was particularly dire in early 1964 as the government

[251] TNA: DO 153/62 "WE SHALL BE OUTSPOKEN," *Echo*, XIV, 1, 2 May 1964.

arrested university student leaders and academics, deported some expatriate academics, and threatened to impose a new legislation that would take away the autonomy of Ghana's universities and bring them under the complete control of the government.[252] The University of Ghana, the country's premier higher education institution, particularly bore the brunt of the government's ire due to the university's substantive and symbolic leadership among Ghana's universities as a hub of resistance to the designs of government. Incubating at the university, widely called Legon in reference to the name of its suburban location on the outskirt of the national capital of Accra, was an emergent national student movement and opposition to the government. Commonwealth Hall, one of five student residential halls at Legon, had become a site for student oppositional politics and planning. Students' use of rhetoric such as "momentous African revolution" and "glorious socialist revolution" was a biting mimicry of the language of the CPP government, which was avowedly pan-Africanist and planned to build Ghana into a socialist nation. Students' appropriation of the CPP's rhetoric also expressed their determination to participate, on their own terms, in the heady national politics of the 1960s, which was informed by the wider processes of decolonization, post-colonial nation-building, and Cold War politics taking place throughout Africa. The deployment of government rhetoric to criticize government's behavior was a common tactic in student political activism. The posture of defiant outspokenness expressed a dominant characteristic of students' involvement in national politics throughout the decades after

[252] TNA: DO 153/62 Ghana Press Release No. 66/64 – Deportation Order Against Six Lecturers, 8 February 1964; TNA: DO 153/62 Savingram from British High Commission to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 8 February 1964; and, TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964.

independence in Ghana. The Nkrumah period, from the late 1950s to mid-1960s, marked the moment for the emergence and structuring of a postcolonial tradition of student activism that was deeply interested and involved in national politics.

The global student and youth protests of the late 1960s spurred some studies of the political behavior of African university students in the early decade of African independence. These studies focused on African students as an incipient and/or presumptive elite and how their status informed their actual and expected social roles. A varied picture of student activism emerges from this literature: from students' occasional protest politics against African governments to their lack of involvement in active politics, which was supposedly conditioned by their desire to belong to a technocratic class that was politically subservient. [253] The literature ascribes minimal significance to the long-term political impact of student activism in the Africa of the early 1960s. Some of these studies on Africa carry a sense of disappointment that African students seemingly did not display the same levels of radicalism that was found among students of the West in the 1960s.[254] Full of theoretical considerations, these studies hardly explore contemporary historical sources that would have tempered their reliance on surveys, and would have yielded insights that could not be captured by the statistics and the surveys.

[253] See Dwaine Marvick, "African University Students: A Presumptive Elite," in James Coleman, ed., *Education and Political Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), William John Hanna, ed., *University Students and African Politics* (New York: African Publishing Co., 1975); Joel Barkan, *An African Dilemma: University Students, Development and Politics in Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 11975).

[254] Ali Mazrui, Review of *University Studies and African Politics*, ed. William John Hanna, *Higher Education* 7, no. 1 (Feb. 1978), 123-126.

The scholarship on Ghana argues the non-significance of student and youth politics in the Nkrumah period of the late 1950s and 1960s. Writing in the late 1960s on students and politics in Ghana, David Finlay observed that Ghanaian students were "spectators and secondary players" in the politics of the Nkrumah period. Finlay focused specifically on the conflicts between the Nkrumah government and public universities about autonomy, the purpose of education, and nationalism among others. While acknowledging a high degree of politicization among university students, Finlay denied them a tradition of activism and contended that the students were thus inclined to accept the CPP's attempts to supplant any independent youth and student associations such as the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) with the CPP's own youth and student groups.[255] Sakyi Awuku Amoa expresses views similar to Finlay's about student politics in Ghana in the 1960s, even though he disagrees about the degree of student politicization. Amoa argues that though students engaged in some political activities in that period, there was no student movement in Ghana because of "the low degree of politicization" among students. In his view, the low politicization of the students was largely due to the political repression of the Nkrumah years, university organization and the "macro-socio-economic systems" of Ghana.[256] Albert Adu Boahen amplifies Amoa's argument about students' political activism in the 1960s. He suggests that except for a few political acts, such as the National Union of Ghana Students' condemnation of and demonstration against the

[255] David Finlay, "Students and Politics in Ghana," *Daedalus* 97, no. 1, (Winter 1968), 51-69.

[256] S. A. Amoa, *University Student's Political Action in Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1979), preface and 34-75. Amoa's work focuses on the period between 1960 and 1971, so his argument about student politics extend beyond the Nkrumah period.

dismissal of Ghana's Chief Justice in 1963, there was no political activism among students during the period of the Nkrumah government.[257]

In this chapter, I argue for the existence of a tradition of student and youth political activism from the early decade of Ghana's independence. Historical evidence belies the claims of the scholars who dismiss the political significance of students in the first decade of Ghana's independence. Influenced by theories that were prevalent in political science and sociology during and shortly after the global student and youth protests of the late 1960s, these scholars did not fully investigate the extent to which Ghanaian students and youth were implicated in the country's politics during the period.[258] Most importantly, they did not utilize or have the benefit of the body of historical materials generated by various sources including the students themselves, which reveal a high level of student politicization and political activism in the 1960s. Student and youth politics in this period of Ghana's history, like in other parts of the continent, constituted an important site out of which emerged people, actions and ideas that shaped the political development of the country.[259]

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[257] A. Adu Boahen, introduction to *The Role of African Student Movements in the political and social evolution of Africa from 1900-1975* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 19-20.

[258] Of the five chapters of Amoa's work, only one (chapter 3) specifically examines students' political activities between 1960-1971. Two chapters (1 and 2) are devoted to theoretical discussions about students' political roles and social movements. Another chapter (4) examines the impact of university organization and general socio-economic conditions on Ghanaian students alleged low politicization. The final chapter (5) is a conclusion with a suggested strategy for increasing students' awareness of their role in national development.

[259] See Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Burgess, "Imagined Generations," 55-78; James Brennan, "Youth, the TANU Youth League and managed vigilantism in Dar es Salaam, 1925-1973," *Africa* 76, no. 2 (2006): 221-246.

Ghanaian university students, like their counterparts elsewhere in early postcolonial Africa, were envisioned and legitimated as key social actors in post-colonial nation building.[260] With regard to youth, as Mamadou Diouf notes, postcolonial African states worked with a "sociology focused on the generational and sexual division of labor and on social and economic mobilization."[261] The Nkrumah government sought to co-opt students to statist interpretations and versions of this agenda while students questioned and resisted those attempts. The students thus advanced their own understandings of their social roles and the national agenda. Sometimes there was dissensus among the students but they managed to craft an independent space for mainstream student activism in national politics. In their political formation, university students saw themselves as a vanguard whose generational politics was constitutive of the political culture of independent Ghana. The politics of students and their national activism during the Nkrumah period were shaped by state initiatives that placed youth at the center of government's development agenda, government-university contentions and confrontations over the higher education of Ghanaian youth in the immediate years after independence, the nature of university education and student culture, and international currents such as African decolonization and Cold War politics in which Ghana and Ghanaians were keen participants and observers.

[260] See, for instance, David Mills, "Life on the Hills: Students and the Social History of Makerere," *Africa: Journal of the International Africa Institute* 76, no. 2 (2006), 263; and Straker, *Youth, Nationalism, and the Guinean Revolution*.

[261] Diouf, "African Youth and Public Space," 3.

Independence and its aftermath: Paths to post-colonial revolutionary youth-hood

On the eve of Ghana's independence in March 1957, as prime minister Kwame Nkrumah gave his famous speech at the old polo grounds in central Accra, he acknowledged the various groups and sections of Ghanaians who had helped to make the achievement of political independence from Britain possible. In thanking the people, he singled out "the youths, the farmers, the women … and the ex-servicemen" for their roles in the independence struggle against the British.[262] These subaltern groups had made possible the mass politics that characterized the nationalist struggle. The pride of place the youth enjoyed on this occupational and gendered list reflected their centrality in the political triumph of the Convention People's Party in the struggle since the party's formation in the late 1940s.[263] The special acknowledgement of the youth out of the lot of Gold Coast society also signaled the new post-colonial government's interest in youth as a national agenda and young people as participants in the construction of the post-colony. "Place the young at the head of the awakened masses. You do not know what strength, what magic influence the voice of the young may have on the crowd. You will find in them the apostles of the new social order," Nkrumah had said.[264]

Besides the CPP's own history with and interest in youth, developments in the immediate pre-independence years also helped to put the question of youth on the CPP's national

[262] Kwame Nkrumah, The Independence Declaration Speech, Accra, 6 March 1957.

[263] See PRAAD-Accra, ADM 16/14, Nkrumah, *History of A Great Party: Birth of My*.

[264] Cited in M. N. Tetteh, *The Ghana Young Pioneer Movement: A Youth Organization in the Kwame Nkrumah Era* (Accra: Ghana Publicity Limited, 1999), 91. Nkrumah made the statement in 1948 and it a guiding thought of his from the late colonial period through post-independence. See Carl G. Rosberg, Jr, and James S. Coleman, eds, *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1964), 313.

agenda. Particularly important were the emergence of the Ashanti-based National Liberation Movement (NLM) and the Accra-based Ga Shifimo Kpee (Ga Standfast Society) which challenged the CPP's hold on power. Though both groups came to embody regionalist or sectional ethnic political claims, their central catalysts were young men and women. The NLM, established in 1954, was triggered by Ashanti farmers' resentment of the CPP government's decision to take a sizable part of the producer price of cocoa as national revenue in the early 1950s. The group soon became a spearhead against the CPP's apparent anti-chief and anti-regional autonomy stances.[265] At the heart of the NLM was a political formation of youths, whose antecedents, as Jean Allman observes, could be traced to the Asante *nkwankwaa* of the 19th century. The NLM therefore represented a resurgence of Asante nationalism with the Ashanti youths serving as its catalysts and ideologues. Many of the active members of the NLM were members of the Ashanti Youth Association. The young men's struggle against the CPP was also a continuation of their historical generational and class struggle with the ruling elites of Asante. The struggle rested upon competing definitions of Asante nationalism or self-determination between the youths and the traditional ruling elite. Ultimately, the young men lost out as the ruling elite managed to wrestle the NLM from their hands. The Asante king, his chiefs and the old guard intelligentsia aligned to deny the young men control and the fruits of any victory the NLM may have had in its contest with the CPP.[266] The Ga Shifimo Kpee, largely made up of the youth of the Ga people, indigenes of Accra, came into being in 1957, the year of independence. Some of its prominent

[265] Rooney, *Vision and Tragedy*, 132-160. For a comprehensive treatment of the NLM see Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine*.

[266] Allman, *Quills of the Porcupine* and Allman, "The Youngmen and the Porcupine."

leaders including its spokesman, Henry Thompson, were former members of the CPP. The group's raison d'être was to protest housing shortages, widespread unemployment, the low representation of Ga people in the CPP government, and the alienation of Ga lands by government, some of which ended up being sold to members of other ethnic groups domiciled in Accra. All these problems, the Shifimo Kpee complained, put the Ga people, especially its youth, at a great disadvantage in the young nation.[267] The group's youthful shock troops, known as the "Tokyo Joes", scored a coup when they managed to picket Kwame Nkrumah's route on his return from the Commonwealth conference in July 1957. There were violent clashes between Shifimo Kpee and the youth wing of the CPP throughout the year.[268]

Maintaining control over youth behavior and ensuring general social order in the midst of the concerns represented by the NLM and Shifimo Kpee became a primary occupation of the CPP. Like the colonial government before it, the CPP diagnosed the problems of the youth as stemming from uncontrolled urbanization and the absence of work, which could structure the lives of youths.[269] The Ghanaian youth, in the thinking and plans of the CPP state, was to be a disciplined, productive and revolutionary patriot with a pan-Africanist outlook, and an important agent in the mobilization and development of the country. This motivated discussions in government circles about state initiatives that would give work

[267] MSS Afr. S. 1681, AB 303/5, "Ga Adangbe Shifimo Kpee", Notes and Interviews of Colin Legum, 1957. Also Ahlman, "A New Type of Citizen," 87-105.

[268] See MSS Afr. S. 1681, AB 303/5, "Interview with Dr. Kwame Nkrumah," Notes and Interviews of Colin Legum, 3 October 1957 and Rooney, *Vision and Tragedy*, 195.

[269] Ahlman, "A New Type of Citizen," 91.

to youth, pry them away from unproductive pursuits, and instill order and discipline in them. By 1956, discussions were far advanced in government circles about how to turn the ruling party's youth wing into a larger state-sponsored national youth movement that would embrace even non-members of the ruling party. Under the direction of Prime Minister Nkrumah, the Ghana Youth Council was established in 1956.[270] The Youth Council had membership drawn from various associations and groups including community and religious ones. A government delegation, made up of Ministers Kofi Baako and Krobo Edusei, Professor Willie Abraham of the University of Ghana, journalists Kofi Batsa and Elliot, and the Methodist priest J.A. Stephens, toured the Soviet Union, Germany, the United States, Britain and Israel to study various models of youth organizations in those countries to guide the Ghanaian experiment. According to the Reverend J.A. Stephens, who was the secretary of the delegation, the models of youth organizing they saw in East Germany, the Soviet Union and in the *kibbutzim* of Israel were most attractive to them. The "structure and organization of both the German and the Soviet Youth Movements," the Reverend Stephens recalls, "[were] more appealing and in line with the future needs of a new Ghana, socially, politically and spiritually". In the Israeli case, the delegation took a liking to youth work in the area of agriculture. These models' emphasis on producing "highly patriotic, creative and respectful, and nationalistic"[271] young men and women aligned well with the CPP's visions of the place and role of youth in the national community. The examples of these foreign models

[270] The establishment of the Ghana Youth Council in 1956 appears to have rather been the co-optation and re-organization of an existing group of the same name, which had Nkrumah as its patron but always wanted to be independent of the control of the CPP government. See Pool, "Now is the Time of Youth, 198-203.

[271] J.S.A Stephens, foreword in Tetteh, *The Ghana Young Pioneer Movement*, x-xiv.

would guide the establishment of the Ghana Builders Brigade and the Ghana Young Pioneers Movement, the two dominant CPP youth mobilization programs rolled out in the late 1950s and 1960s.

The establishment of the Ghana Builders Brigade, commonly called the Workers Brigade, in 1957 occurred in the context of the Shifimo Kpee agitations and represented the CPP government's early engagement with issues of youth. The Brigade, numbering about 25,000 members nationwide by 1966, was to deal with the widespread youth unemployment and the urban housing shortage, which had been sources of agitation. The young women and men who joined the Brigade were given civic and vocational training in various fields with the aim of disciplining and turning them into productive and patriotic citizens. Brigade members worked on projects in agriculture, road and housing construction, auto mechanics, sewing and other crafts across the nation.[272]

Through the Workers Brigade, as Jeffrey Ahlman observes, the CPP state positioned itself as the initiator, guarantor and guardian of a process of turning the country's youth into "revolutionary adulthood". The Brigade, however, offered Ghanaian "young men and women new opportunities for challenging generational and gender hierarchies in their communities". Young women and men who joined the Brigade did not simply live within the dictates of the "political and social mission" of the state. The image of young women driving tractors on Brigade farms, for instance, needled at long-held gender notions and was empowering to the girls involved. Brigade members took advantage of

[272] Ahlman, "A New Type of Citizen," 88.

the opportunities to forge alternative paths to adulthood. They earned incomes and developed skills that they could transform into more independent adult careers and choices.[273]

A similar perspective emerges from Ghanaian youth who were members of the Ghana Young Pioneer Movement (GYPM), another youth initiative of the CPP. A subject of much attention and controversy in its day and beyond, the Young Pioneer Movement (YPM), whose members were popularly called the Young Pioneers, was established in 1960 as the signal national youth movement that would provide skills-training, and civic and moral education to Ghanaian youth. It was the direct result of the discussions and plans within the CPP to establish a national movement of youth dating from the mid-1950s.[274] The government delegation that toured the world to study different models of national youth organizations in 1956 gave the idea a fillip in its recommendations.[275] The YPM mirrored the Workers Brigade in some of the skills that were taught and acquired by youth, but the CPP had more revolutionary aims for the YPM and therefore the Young Pioneers were exposed to a broader range of activities and skills-training including technical expertise in seamanship and airmanship as well as in dressmaking, textile design, agriculture, and engineering. Matthew N. Tetteh, one of the early recruits to the YPM in 1961, recalls with pride the enthusiasm and sense of accomplishment that was generated among the Young Pioneers who were involved in projects like the air-piloting

[273] Ahlman, "A New Type of Citizen," 93-98.

[274] Pool, "Now is the Time of Youth," 203-205.

[275] Stephens, foreword in Tetteh, *The Ghana Young Pioneer Movement*.

and gliding school in Afienya, near the capital, Accra, and the coxswain program in Takoradi.[276]

As the CPP state consolidated itself ideologically with a clearer drift towards socialism in the 1960s, the YPM became one of the organizations for ideological training and source of recruiting young cadres for the party and nation building in keeping with the blueprint of the ruling party. This was reflected in the drive to establish branches of the movement in secondary and post-secondary institutions. The Ministry of Education instructed the heads of educational institutions to facilitate the formation of branches of the YPM in their schools as a matter of national policy. Failure to comply with the directive was considered a legal offense.[277] Much of the controversy about the movement turned on this, especially in the alleged indoctrination of Ghanaian children and the attempted re-engineering of the national educational system for CPP ideological purposes.[278]

There were groups outside of government control that drew inspiration from the CPP's agenda for the youth. The Voluntary Workcamps Association of Ghana, known popularly as 'Volu,' was one such organization. It was formed in 1957, the same year that the Worker's Brigade was established, and tended to mirror the Brigade in many of its work and leisure activities. 'Volu' was largely targeted at secondary school students but there

[276] Tetteh, *The Ghana Young Pioneer Movement*, 79-91.

[277] PRAAD-Tamale, NRG 11/17 Circular on the Establishment of Young Pioneer Movement in Higher Institutions, Ministry of Education, Accra, 15 February 1962.

[278] See Tetteh, *The Ghana Young Pioneer Movement*. Also see *Report of the Education Review Committee* (Accra: Government of Ghana, July 1967). For a detailed study of the YPM in the state building agenda of the CPP, see Pool, "Now is the Time of Youth."

were a few members who were students of the country's teacher training colleges and the universities. Operating during school vacations, 'Volu' members constructed infrastructure in the areas of health, sanitation, education, and community centers among others in the towns and villages of the country. Outside of work, 'Volu' members organized dances, games and other sporting activities for leisure. Like their counterparts in the state-sponsored Worker's Brigade, members of the Voluntary Workcamps found their work and the skills acquired empowering particularly in negotiating intergenerational relations. One member would recall to the *New Ghana* magazine that besides the pride he took in the physical evidence of the work of 'Volu' members, "just as important is that fact that the older generation has begun to watch him with respect, to listen to what he has to say and to learn from him.[279]" The opportunity to negotiate and even challenge generational and gender hierarchies in Ghanaian society in these schemes was an attraction for Ghanaian youth.[280]

In spite of the coincidence of aims and objectives among youth groups in the early decade of independence, there were sometimes tensions between the independent youth groups and the CPP's, especially the YPM, which enjoyed the highest official sanction. The tension stemmed from the lack of clarity about the YPM's status as having "official primacy" or whether its members could belong to other youth organizations as well.[281] This conundrum also reflected a long-standing and wider debate about ways to achieve

[279] Harry Korang, "Worthy Cause for the Youth," *New Ghana*, XIV, 1, 1970.

[280] Ahlman, "A New Type of Citizen."

[281] Pool, "Now is the Time of Youth," 203.

political consolidation within the CPP, which ultimately was resolved in favor of the one-party state. The party sought to extinguish all other political affiliations except to the CPP with its policy of democratic centralism.[282] There were parallel moves by the CPP to bring women and farmer organizations, for instance, to heel.[283] The terrain of youth organizations was however much more complex and proved difficult for such totalizing experiments. Entrenched institutions like the churches with their own history of youth organizations undermined the CPP's moves. In fact, the opposition to the YPM and the broadcasting of claims about its indoctrination of youth, and possible blasphemy, emanated from the church.[284] Nkrumah's conflictual relationship with Ghanaian churches partly turned on the belief in Christian circles that Nkrumah and his government were undermining Christian values among youth and were encouraging the youth to appropriate Christian terminology to sacralize the personality of Nkrumah.[285] The truth or otherwise of these allegations notwithstanding, the YPM reflected the CPP's progressive identification of ideological training with general education, an intensification of the struggles over youth, and the formation of a public sphere in which issues about youth

[282] See Mss. Afr. s. 1681, AB 303/5 "Points that emerged from dinner table discussion with Dr. Nkrumah," 6 October 1957, and "The Government's Position," 13-20, Notes and Interviews of Colin Legum, 1957 and Selwyn Ryan, "The Theory and Practice of One Partyism: The CPP Re-examined," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 4, no. 2 (1970): 145-172.

[283] See Manuh, "Women and Their Organizations," 101-127, and Tsikata, " Women's political organizations," 77-80.

[284] Tetteh, *The Ghana Young Pioneer Movement*, 93-98, foreword, xvi-xxi.

[285] Joshua Pobee, "Church and State in Ghana, 1949-1966," in *Religion in a Pluralistic Society: Essays Presented to Professor C. G. Baeta*, ed. Joshua Pobee (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 128-138. Also see Joshua Pobee, *Kwame Nkrumah and the Church in Ghana, 1949-1966* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1988) and Ebenezer Obiri Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study in Religion and Politics in Ghana* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1997).

would become very important because they were at the center of the development of the postcolonial nation.

Higher education would become the terrain where these issues would be made more manifest. The politics over higher education reflected broader contentions in Ghanaian politics about how the country was being run. The CPP's fractious interactions with the universities and its increasing authoritarianism facilitated the emergence of students' political activism which actively engaged the Nkrumah state over many issues. The nature of university education and student culture in these universities incubated the political activism of students. Ghanaian students thus carried into the post-colonial period the generational politics that animated Ghana in its colonial days.

The universities and student culture

By independence in 1957, Ghana had two universities. A third would be added in 1962. The premier university was established in 1948 as the University College of Ghana, on the premises of the colonial government-sponsored Achimota School, and was subsequently moved to its permanent location at the nearby township of Legon, all in the national capital of Accra. The establishment of the University College followed the colonial government's acceptance of the minority opinion of the Walter Eliot Commission that rather recommended the setting up of a single university for all of British West Africa in Ibadan, Nigeria. Gold Coast nationalists protested this decision and demanded their own institution of higher education, to which the colonial government acceded. The second university, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science

and Technology (KNUST), in Kumasi, started life as the Kumasi College of Technology. It was officially incorporated in 1951 and opened it doors to the first batch of students in 1952. Both colleges were affiliated to the University of London, which saw to their general academic regulations and award of degrees and diplomas. In 1961, both colleges became full-fledged autonomous universities and ended their relationship with the University of London. In 1962, the CPP government established a third university college, which later became the University of Cape Coast, with a primary focus on producing graduate teachers and educators for Ghana's second cycle institutions of teacher training colleges and secondary schools.[286] These three institutions became the sites of the confrontational politics over higher education of Ghanaian youth involving the government, the authorities of the universities and the students.

Student culture in these universities revolved around the residential hall system that could be found in all of the institutions. The student residential halls were more than dormitories. They were fashioned after the British university collegiate system, particularly Oxford and Cambridge, where residential colleges of a university structured the academic and social life of its student members. The residential hall system in the Ghanaian institutions was also an advanced version of the secondary school boarding system in which students were housed in dormitories. Though the ultimate management

[286] G. F. Daniel, "The Universities in Ghana," *The Commonwealth Universities Year Book* 1, (1997-98): 649-656. For detailed histories of higher education in Ghana see Apollos Nwauwa, *Imperialism, Academe and Nationalism: Britain and University Education for Africans, 1860-1960* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), and Francis Agbodeka, *A History of University of Ghana: Half a century of higher education (1948-1998)* (Accra: Woeli Publishers, 1998). Also see Takyiwaa Manuh, Sulley Gariba and Joseph Budu, *Change and Transformation in Ghana's Publicly Funded Universities: A study of experiences, lessons and opportunities* (Oxford and Accra: James Currey and Woeli Publishers, 2007).

of the halls was in the hands of university-appointed faculty tutors and wardens, student leaders, elected by their peers, managed student affairs on a day-to-day basis. The student leaders and the rest of the student body in each hall together constituted the Junior Common Room (JCR). Each hall of residence developed a distinct character with its own traditions and rituals of belonging. However, they all contributed to a shared university student culture whose central political institutions were the JCRs in each hall and the Student Representative Council (SRC) at the university level. The JCRs and the SRCs in the various institutions served a participatory function that allowed for decision making to emanate from the grassroots of students to their leaders. The nature of this participatory model was the index against which students measured participation in the larger polity and was also a mechanism for rallying students against dictatorial regimes.[287]

The university hall system was a central plank in the social and political formation of the students. It facilitated the development of networks and friendships among students who came from different regions and districts of the country. As has been argued for the secondary school boarding system, the university residential halls grounded and gave materiality to the students' imagination of themselves as members of the same national community.[288] For a multi-ethnic country, this was of great import as the university experience helped to build loyalty towards the new nation-state among its incipient elite.

[287] See, for instance, TNA: DO 153/62 Letter from students of the University of Ghana to the Chancellor [Kwame Nkrumah], 6 February 1964; TNA: DO 153/62 Secret Report on Student Activity at Legon, British High Commission, Accra, 6 February 1964; and Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power.*

[288] See Steve Tonah, "Democratization and the Resurgence of Ethnic Politics in Ghana," in *Ethnicity, Belonging and Biography*, eds. Gabriele Rosenthal and Artur Bogner (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009), 67.

The hall system also contributed to the political socialization of students as politics and political ideas were a dominant fare of daily intercourse among students in these halls.[289]

Beyond everyday intercourse among students in classes and their halls of residence, there were also informal networks of discussion cells, groups, and clubs on the campuses, in which students discussed important questions of politics, economy and ideology as it pertained to the country, Africa and the world. The animus of the state media in the Nkrumah years against Kofi Abrefa Busia, professor of sociology and leading figure in the political opposition to Kwame Nkrumah in the late 1950s, was partly because he ran one of such campus study cells, which the press thought was used to foster opposition among the students against Nkrumah. The state media often complained about the formal and informal influence Busia exerted on university culture even after he had gone into exile.[290] Willie Abraham, a philosopher at Legon and close confidante of Kwame Nkrumah, also led one such discussion cell devoted to ideology and philosophy whose hub was a reading room at the philosophy department at the university.[291] These discussion cells were opportunities for the circulation and debate of ideas among students and proved very influential, and animated student culture.

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[289] See *Echo*, XIV 1, 2 May 1964, *Echo*, XIV 2, 9 May 1964; Interview with Gyan Appenteng, September 2010, and Ekwow Spio-Garbrah, "Vandalism: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *The Ghanaian Observer*, 28 May 2010, http://www.ghanaianobserver.net/content/vandalism-yesterday-today-tomorrow. (Accessed online on August 19, 2010)

[290] "Stop This Subversion," Editorial, *Ghanaian Times*, 7 February 1964 and Kweku Yakubu, "Our Students and the African Revolution," *The Spark*, 5 February 1965, 7.

[291] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Memo from R. Thomas, British High Commission, Accra, to Commonwealth Relations Office, London, 21 March 1964.

A vibrant on-campus literary sub-culture and journalism also facilitated the politicization of students and intellectual exchange among them and their professors. Student-run periodicals on the various university campuses were important sources of news coverage, analysis, commentary and discussions. Student discourses in these journals were also revelatory of their understandings of their self-formation and intellectual development. The periodicals were of varying kinds and quality – from more popular, and sometimes badly designed, magazines, newsletters and bulletins to more specialist ones. Some of these periodicals such as the *Legonite* at the University of Ghana and the *Oguaa Chronicle* of the University of Cape Coast were university-wide student-run newspapers. Other periodicals such as the *Echo*, the *Sputnik*, and the *Siren* at Legon, and the *Telescope* at KNUST, were ran by the student leadership in various residential halls in the universities. These provided students the space for critical reportage, commentary and debate on Ghanaian politics. In terms of their political nature, the student periodicals continued the tradition of nationalistic journalism in Ghana that dated back to the late 19th century. The student periodicals focused critically on government and the state. The *Echo* of the Commonwealth Hall of the University of Ghana appears to have had greater consistency in publication as it was sometimes the only on-campus magazine copied on many public statements and open letters that student organizations issued on national issues especially during the students' struggles with the Nkrumah government in 1960s.[292] These student journals were at the center of the spread and discussion of ideas that pervaded the campuses of the institutions of higher learning. These media covered a wide array of topical issues of concern to both Ghana and Africa, which reflected the

[292] See, for instance, TNA: DO153/62 Letter of students of the University of Ghana to their Chancellor [Kwame Nkrumah], 6 February 1964.

active engagement of Ghanaian students, whatever their ideological and political persuasions, with the issues of the day. Connor Cruise O'Brien, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana in the early to mid-1960s, observed that the student magazines at his university demonstrated considerable independence and fearlessness in their criticism of government and often he had to call on the editors to exercise restraint.[293] Diplomatic sources in Ghana observed in the mid 1960s, for instance, that the *Legonite* was "openly critical of the government's policies" and was "probably the only such overt publication in the whole of Ghana" in its critical reportage of the Nkrumah government.[294] Against the state media and CPP-sponsored student magazines such as *The African Student*, which was first published in late 1964 as a concomitant of the establishment of party branches in the universities,[295] the *Legonite* and other student periodicals would form a critical public sphere. In addition to the fairly regular periodicals, there were the special journals of limited or occasional duration that students published during particular crises or moments in their political campaigns or challenges against government. There was, for instance, the special cyclo-style newssheet that the students produced during their confrontations with Nkrumah in 1964-65.[296]

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[293] TNA: DO 153/62 Internal Memo, Notes on Talk with Vice-Chancellor O'Brien, by Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, 25 February 1964.

[294] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964. Also see TNA: DO 153/63 Confidential Memo from R. Thomas, British High Commission, Accra, to R. M. Price, West Africa Department, CRO, London, 11 July 1964.

[295] See TNA: DO 153/63 *The African Student (University Socialist Review)*, October 1965 and *The African Student (University Socialist Review)*, Vol. 2, November 1964-January 1965.

[296] TNA: DO 153/62 Secret Report on Student Activity at Legon, British High Commission, Accra, 19 February 1964.

At the national level, the central student organization was the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS). The NUGS, established in 1959,[297] continued a tradition of student associations such as the Union of Gold Coast Students, which dated back to the 1930s and 1940s.[298] The membership and the executive of the NUGS were made up of representatives of the various student representative councils of the universities. Its national officers were elected from the public universities on a rotational basis, with each university holding the leadership for a year. The NUGS also had affiliations with other student groups with national, pan-African, and international orientations and objectives such as the Confederation of West African Students.[299] Together these organizations gave institutional and organizational form to students' political activism.

General academic work, the discussion cells, organizations and clubs, and campus life generally fed into the university students' views of themselves as a vanguard. For the first generation of higher education students in post-colonial Africa, this vanguardist self-perception was underscored by the sense that they were important players in a new era in Africa. Thomas Burgess' observation about educated Zanzibari youth in the independence years of the 1960s is applicable to Ghanaian students in the same period: they were marked by their formal education, especially higher education, had access to

[297] Boahen, introduction to *The Role of African Student*, 13.

[298] William D. Angel, *Youth Movements of the World* (Essex, UK: Longman, 1990), 234. Angel asserts that the NUGS is directly descended from the Union of Gold Coast Students (UGCS) formed in the 1930s and adopted its current name in 1962. For a discussion of student unions in the late 1930s and 1940s Gold Coast, and the formation of a Gold Coast Students Union (GCSU) in 1943, see J. W. Acquah, "The student unions in the country," *The Gold Coast Observer*, 2 June 1944, 38.

[299] TNA: DO153/62 Letter of students of the University of Ghana to their Chancellor [Kwame Nkrumah], 6 February 1964 and TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964.

new political language and doctrines, interests in modernist ideas and images, and new consumer tastes and leisure styles.[300] This is the picture that emerges from the recollection of John Schram, who was a young Canadian graduate student at the University of Ghana in the mid 1960s. He observes of the university and its students in that period:

> Oxbridge on a tropical hill just beyond Accra; luxurious residence halls, gardens, courtyards, and fountains;…all the Star beer one could drink; good friends; and lively dances under the palms to Ghana's infectious highlife music. I was impressed…with [Ghana's] free post-secondary education, which my hard-working Ghanaian colleagues seemed to regard as a serious responsibility…Though a law school graduate from Toronto, I was no match for their [the Ghanaian students'] broad classical educations, their debating skills, and the sheer elegance of their written and spoken English. These Ghanaians were confident, assured and welcoming. There were in at the start of a new Africa then…[301]

The physical ambience of the university merged with the sense of a new beginning for the country and continent, and with the widespread vanguardist sentiment among Ghanaian students. Even in leisure the sense of being a generation apart pervaded: *Star* beer had been introduced on the Ghanaian market in the year after Independence and highlife music occupied a central place in Ghanaian popular culture as the quintessential music genre of Independence.[302] Schram's observation about the vanguardism of the

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[300] Burgess,"Imagined Generations," 57-59. Also see Mills, "Life on the Hills."

[301] John Schram, "Where Ghana went right: How one African country emerged intact from its post-colonial struggles," *The Walrus*, July-August 2010 (http://thewalrus.ca/where-ghana-went-right/). Accessed 8 October 2014. Schram returned to Ghana as Canada's ambassador to Ghana and other West African countries from 1994-1998.

[302] Dmitri van den Bersselaar, "The Rise of Branded Alcoholic Drinks in West Africa," in *Drugs in Africa: Histories and Ethnographies of Use, Trade and Control*, eds. Gernot Klanschnig, Neil Carrier and Charles Ambler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 60, and Nate Plageman, "African Personality dances

students was well grounded. The student-ran periodical, the *Legonite*, expressed the notion of such vanguardism when it said in a 1966 editorial that it was the

> medium through which we [students] can demonstrate to the world our own individual attitudes to what we learn here and to what goes on generally in the world in which we live. At the national level, the magazine exists as a conduit pipe for the transmission of the ideas that we gather from our diverse studies here, to the bulk of the people still languishing in the depths of superstition, ignorance and disease.[303]

This vision of an enlightened generation leading the rest of the country to tackle its development needs remained characteristic of educated Ghana youth throughout the post-independence period and was a motivator in their politics.

International events and currents of thought also served as important contexts for deepening the vanguardist student culture and politics in the decades after independence. African decolonization, the Cold War, the American civil rights movement, Ghana's avowedly activist foreign policy among others had direct implications for the political formation of Ghanaian university students. The students were in the thick of discussions about these events and processes, and were influenced in their political activism by them. The various students' magazines of this period were also full of reports, features and opinion pieces that reveal students' high interest in international affairs and their

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Highlife: Popular Music, Urban Youth, and Cultural Modernization in Nkrumah's Ghana, 1957-1965," in *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa*, eds. Peter J. Bloom, Stephan Miescher and Takyiwaa Manuh (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 244-267.

[303] *Legonite*, Lent, 1966.

implications for Ghana and Africa's politics.[304] The congresses and meetings of the NUGS often devoted considerable time to discussing international events of import to Africa and the world and formulated positions that were made public.[305] The NUGS and other student groups saw themselves as a necessary part of an international movement of students and youth: they affiliated themselves to foreign groups and participated in international conferences where ideas were exchanged and lessons learned in activism.

'Education in Citizenship': The state, public universities and struggles over higher education

The confrontations between the Nkrumah government, on one hand, and public university authorities and students, on the other hand, over higher education in the early decade of post-independence have been cast as expressions of different perspectives about university autonomy, academic freedom, the purpose of higher education, nationalism, and Africa-relevant knowledge.[306] While that depiction of the confrontations is broadly accurate, the conflict was essentially about youth: the kind of youth and citizen that was suitable for the new post-colony. The conflict reflected different conceptions of the place and role of youth in the project of post-independence nation building. That the terrain of the conflict was higher education put the accent on the role of educated youth in national development. What were to be the terms, conditions and content of higher

[304] See, for instance, TNA: DO 153/62 Isaac Armah, "Southern Rhodesia, World Peace and African Revolution," *Echo*, XIV, 2, May 9, 1964, 10, TNA: DO 153/63 *The African Student*, October 1965 and *The African Student)*, Vol. 2, November 1964-January 1965.

[305] See, for instance, TNA: DO 153/62 Resolutions on International Affairs of the Second Annual Congress of the National Union of Ghana Students, Legon, 22 December, 1963; and "African Students Get Militant", *New Ghana,* 1, 25 (1972), 5.

[306] See Finlay, "Students and Politics in Ghana," Amoa, *University Students' Political Action*, and Rooney, *Vision and Tragedy*.

education that would produce civic-minded Ghanaian youth? The CPP's state-driven national development agenda, which was undergirded by its socialist and pan-Africanist orientation, conditioned its position(s) in this conflict. As the ruling party drifted more clearly to the left in the 1960s, it became more sensitive to the seeming gulf between the state and Ghanaian universities, and proved more contentious about higher education. The university authorities and students who opposed the state sought to maintain the British-inspired standards of education with which higher education had commenced in Ghana in the late colonial period. An expatriate observer of the conflict commented that those who opposed the Nkrumah state were carrying "the flag of western liberalism,"[307] but if they did, they also offered competing visions of pan-African nationalism and how they were to be integrated into the higher education of Ghanaian youth.

The CPP's disquiet over the seeming gap between its objectives and programs, and the direction of Ghana's public universities was being given public expression by the late 1950s. The ruling party's concerns about the universities were framed in nationalist terms. In 1959, Kwame Nkrumah complained about what he saw as the public universities' unresponsiveness to national interests even though they were supported by public and state funds. He expected a more nationalist and pan-Africanist fervor to be in play at the universities and vowed to impose that by reforms given his suspicion that the universities were becoming hubs for anti-government criticism, unpatriotic activities and

[307] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964.

pro-West predilections in terms of the training that Ghanaian youth received at these institutions and the outlook of the professoriate.[308]

When the University College of Ghana and the Kumasi College of Science and Technology became full-fledged autonomous universities in 1961, Nkrumah moved to be installed as the chancellor of these institutions. Though his status as chancellor was in keeping with the tradition of national leaders being the ceremonial heads of institutions of higher learning in some countries, and in Ghana's case an inherited colonial tradition,[309] Nkrumah's real aim was to put himself and his government in a position to exercise a greater control over the universities and to get them to deliver on the kind of education the CPP government wanted for Ghanaian youth. The state-owned newspaper, the *Ghanaian Times*, hailed Nkrumah's chancellor appointment as a revolutionary moment that would end the days of especially the University of Ghana as "a den of academic reaction". The paper also celebrated the appointment to the universities' governing councils "revolutionary comrades who believe in the conditioning of studies at our universities to suit African requirements and aspirations". These "revolutionary comrades" were either ministers of state, CPP officials or prominent Ghanaians with clear sympathies for the ruling party. The paper decried the content of the universities' existing curricula and, as a result of the new round of appointments, anticipated changes in the curricula that would produce a new kind of youth:

[308] Rooney, *Vision and Tragedy*, 276.

[309] It was in keeping with the British tradition where the monarch was the titular/ceremonial head of British public institutions of higher learning.

> …we are certain that with Osagyefo [Kwame Nkrumah] and his revolutionary Ministers firmly in the saddle, the University of Accra and the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, will produce young African men and women who are prepared to use their hands and their brains to accelerate Ghana's reconstruction along socialist lines, and Africa's redemption along Nkrumaist paths.[310]

The *Ghanaian Times* leader foreshowed some of the themes that formed the government's approach to higher education as the CPP state moved in more apparent ways towards socialism and championed the course of pan-African unity throughout the 1960s.

In his speeches at the chancellor installation ceremonies at both universities in November 1961, Nkrumah stressed nationalism and pan-Africanism as the guiding philosophy for Ghanaian higher education. At the University of Ghana, he drew a historical connection between the fluorescence of nationalist activity in 1948 and the establishment of the university in the same year. The founding of the then University College of Ghana in 1948, he observed, developed from a nationalist desire and had been sustained by public funds. The transformation of the university college into an autonomous full-fledged university was therefore "the flowering of a national ambition" and it was to focus on solving national problems facing Ghana. He highlighted the university's decision to make a course in African Studies a requirement for every student and argued that it was necessary "if we should eradicate the colonial mentality…." He was particularly insistent on the usefulness of a general training in African studies to students for his African unification project: "It is important for every student to maintain his links with the

[310] TNA: BW 90/382, "Osagyefo Hits the Mark", editorial, *Ghanaian Times*, 6 June, 1961.

African scene, and thus understand the great cause of African unity to which we are committed."[311] A few days later, at the university in Kumasi, he re-iterated his understanding of the raison d'être for Ghanaian public universities:

> A university must cultivate in its students a sound intellectual discipline and a keen sense of responsibility. It should give them training in the special fields as well as general educational background which should enable them to play their part effectively as responsible and reliable citizens in a new evolving state.

While emphasizing the universality of scientific and technological knowledge, he demanded a national and African outlook in the university's scholarly work and the training it provided to students. "It is from this university in particular," he said, "that the national needs will be met, and on it much of the future of this country and, possibly, of Africa will depend."[312] The government's emphasis on educated youth with a strong sense of responsibility to the nation and the continent did not, in and of itself, raise any eyebrows in the universities. That conception of higher education and educated youth was widely shared by both students and faculty of Ghana's universities. A greater opposition was, however, elicited as the CPP government drifted more clearly towards socialism and became more insistent in shaping the higher education of youth to suit its political program.

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[311] Kwame Nkrumah, "Speech at installation as first chancellor of the University of Ghana and the inauguration of the University, Legon-Accra, 25 November 1961," in *Flower of Learning: Some reflections on African Learning, Ancient and Modern by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah* (Accra: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1961), 5-8.

[312] Kwame Nkrumah, "Speech by Kwame Nkrumah at his installation as first chancellor of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and the inauguration of the University, Kumasi, 29 November 1961," in *Flower of Learning*, 12-16.

Internal changes in the CPP and external developments in the early 1960s would make the government more insistent in seeking control over the universities. By the end of 1962 the ruling party's ideological complexion was undergoing an obvious change. The party's leftwing, mostly made up of the more youthful members, came into prominence and exercised a greater influence over the party and government than before. The leftwing led the charge to bring the universities to heel. Though a broadly leftist posture had always been part of the platform of the CPP since its formation in 1949, leftists in the party did not come into their own until the early 1960s. In fact, in the 1950s Nkrumah had to take the action of purging the party of some leftist elements because their visible presence in positions of influence could jeopardize the granting of early independence as the colonial state made this a prerequisite for decolonization. Kofi Batsa, later to become the editor of the CPP state's ideological journal *The Spark*, was one of the Marxists who were dismissed from the party and government service in the 50s.[313] Also, there was the need to bring all sectors of Ghanaian society to the cause of the CPP in the final phase of the independence struggle, and the radicals' insistence on a "narrower ideological and organizational definition" of the party's platform was seen as unhelpful to the desire to build a true mass party. Leftist tendencies within the party were, however, not totally stamped out. Nkrumah also did not give up the ideal of building a socialist society. From 1960 onwards the radical wing started to make a comeback. The party was re-organized with a renewed emphasis on party ideological education. This could be seen in the establishment of the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute at Winneba, which was to train socialist cadres for the party. Another party affiliate, the National Association of

[313] Batsa, *From Nkrumah to Limann,* 11-12. See also Ryan, *Theory and Practice of African One Partyism*.

Socialist Students (NASSO), was also reorganized to create a new group of vanguard activists.[314] The ascendant left exercised its influence by working through NASSO, the party's integral units such as the national umbrella association of trade unions, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and the state press – the *Evening News*, *Ghanaian Times*, and *The Spark*. Members of NASSO established branches of the CPP on the campuses of the universities among faculty and students.[315] The campus branches would become bridgeheads for the CPP's attempts to influence the work of the universities. The state newspapers were also at the heart of the conflict over higher education and the training of youth. The editorial leadership of these newspapers included radical journalists such as Sam Ikoku and Kofi Batsa (editors of *The Spark*), Eric Heymann (editor of the *Evening News*), and Cecil Forde and T. D. Baffoe (editors of the *Ghanaian Times*). They had the support of John Tettegah, the head of the Trades Union Congress, Tawia Adamafio, the CPP general secretary until he fell from grace,[316] and Professor William Abraham, a philosopher at the University of Ghana and a close confidante of Kwame Nkrumah.[317] The newspapers provided the space for criticisms of the universities and articulated the

[314] Ryan, *Theory and Practice of African One Partyism*, 146-147, 150-151.

[315] "Legon Rocks as Party Branch Opens," *Ghanaian Times*, 19 October 1964; "Varsity Boys Must serve the people", *Ghanaian Times*, 19 October 1964; "Party Branch for Legon," *Daily Graphic*, 19 October 1964; and, "Cape Coast Varsity Gets Party Branch," *Ghanaian Times*, 10 November, 1964.

[316] Batsa, 13. Tawia Adamafio invited Batsa back into the party and worked for Batsa to become part of the editorial leadership of the party press. Adamafio later fell from grace when he was accused of having a hand in the attempt on Nkrumah's life at Kulungugu in August 1962. He was thereafter demonized in the press by some of his ex-colleagues.

[317] William E. Abraham, author of the seminal philosophical text *The Mind of Africa* (1963), was regarded by some as a principal collaborator in the writing of Nkrumah's book, *Consciencism* (1964). Abraham contributed frequently to the state newspapers and, most importantly, featured prominently in some of the issues of contention between the CPP government and the universities. (See TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Dispatch from the British High Commissioner, Ghana, to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964).

arguments for the nationalistic, socialist and pan-Africanist education that the CPP wanted. The papers made the conflict over higher education a public political spectacle.

The radical turn in the party was reinforced by external events and changes in the country's foreign relations, all of which had a direct impact on the debates about higher education and youth training in Ghana. Events such as the Congo crisis of the early 1960s helped to boost the rise of the radicals. While Nkrumah became more suspicious of Western intrigues in the crisis, his view of the events tended to coincide with that of Russia and other members of the Eastern bloc such as China.[318] The leftwing took advantage of these happenings to come more and more into the picture, as it were. The government also indicated a broader drift towards the Eastern bloc, especially the Soviet Union and China, at this time. Initial contact between independent Ghana and the Soviet Union could be traced to the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) conference held in Cairo between December 1957 and January 1958. The Soviet Union, which was a member of the AAPSO, played a key role in the conference as it saw in it an opportunity to gain a foothold in Africa. The Soviets offered unconditional aid to African countries that were interested.[319] Not much, however, seems to have materialized immediately after the conference in terms of Ghana-Soviet Union relations as it took about a year and a half later for diplomatic relations to be established between the two

[318] W. Scott Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy, 1957-1966: Diplomacy, Ideology, and the New State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).

[319] *Ashanti Pioneer*, January 6, 1958.

countries in April 1959.[320] In the case of China, although a Ghanaian trade delegation had been to Peking in July 1959, it was in mid-1960 that an agreement was reached between the two countries for the exchange of ambassadors. These initial relations with countries of the Eastern bloc up to early 1960 allowed Ghana to balance out her relations with Western nations such as Britain and the US and, to be more assertive in its non-alignment than it had been in the years immediately following independence.[321] From mid-1960, however, Ghana sought a greater consolidation of its ties with the East. Events in the Congo crisis made the eastward turn more ideologically purposive. Nkrumah was critical of both Western and Russian intervention in the Congo but he converged with the Russians in their support of the Lumumba regime. A Ghanaian delegation, led John Tettegah and Tawia Adamafio, secured agreement with the Soviets on plans for economic, technical and cultural cooperation, and for an increase in trade.[322] In February 1961, Leonid Brezhnev, then Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, visited Ghana. Nkrumah responded with a tour of the Soviet Union and other Eastern countries in mid-1961.[323] The drift towards socialism would be consolidated in the mid 1960s with greater talk of and moves towards the building of a one-party socialist state. By mid-1964, Ghana had officially become a one-party state following a referendum earlier in the year. The process would put a greater emphasis on the role of education in a socialist state.

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[320] Kwesi Armah, *Peace without Power: Ghana's Foreign 1957-1966* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2004), 161.

[321] Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 102, 164.

[322] *Daily Graphic*, 8 August 1960.

[323] Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 173.

As part of the cultural and technical cooperation agreements reached with the countries of the East bloc, Ghana requested and received offers of faculty for the universities. The government hoped that these professors from the East would break the back of the Western influence that was dominant in Ghanaian higher education. A significant number of the teaching faculty of the universities in the early 1960s was expatriate, the majority of whom were Britons. At the University of Ghana, for instance, out of a teaching faculty of 175 in 1962 about 130 were expatriates, mostly British.[324] The situation had not changed much in 1964: out of 230 teaching faculty about 100 was British, with an addition of a few more from the US and other Western nations.[325] The government therefore welcomed academics from the East bloc with much eagerness. The state press put forward the government's position. The *Ghanaian Times* in a February 1964 editorial accused most of the academic staff of the universities of antagonism towards the CPP's socialist program and turning the universities into "the breeding grounds of reactionary thought." This, in the paper's view, was subversion. The paper therefore welcomed faculty from the socialist bloc and others with a leftist orientation from elsewhere who would take "cognizance of the social and political system for which they are expected to train the youth". The paper hailed the example of the appointment of the Polish economist Jan Drewnowski to the headship of the University of Ghana's Department of Economics as a "great step forward" because it represented the ideological re-orientation

[324] TNA: DO 153/62 Letter from C. Ewool-Lewis, West Africa Department, Commonwealth Relations Office, London to Richard Thomas, British High Commission, Accra, 16 April 1964.

[325] TNA: DO 153/62 Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964.

of the universities that the government supported.[326] Whenever an academic from the socialist bloc arrived in the country to take up a teaching appointment in any of the universities, the press reported it extensively.[327]

The reality of getting a sufficient number of academics from the East bloc to replace the scholars from the West was, however, far more complex than the government was willing to admit. Many of the East bloc countries did not have the expertise to spare. There was also a language problem: many of the academics from the East could not communicate effectively in English, the medium of instruction at the universities. This made for very difficult and awkward classes, and the situation exercised the attention and concern of the authorities of the universities, as Connor Cruise O'Brien of the University of Ghana admitted in private conversations.[328] The Bulgarian ambassador in Accra told his British counterpart that his government could not meet a Ghanaian request for Bulgarian academics to teach in Ghana's universities because Bulgaria did not have enough

[326] TNA: DO 153/62, "Stop this subversion", editorial, *Ghanaian Times*, 7 February, 1964. Jan Drewnowski started teaching at the University of Ghana in 1961 (See Jacek Luszniewski, "Jan Drewnowski (1908-2000) - Ekonomista na służbie publicznej [economist in the service of the public]," Szkoła Główna Handlowa (SGH, Warsaw School of Economics), January 2006, 108-109. Drewnowski represented the University of Ghana at a UNESCO-sponsored meeting of economics scholars called to write an economics textbook for African students at the London School of Economics in July 1962. (See UNESCO/SS/IEA/Teach. Ec./AFR. Summary Record of Meeting to discuss the writing of a University Textbook of Economics for African Students, London School of Economics, 16-17 July, 1962).

[327] See, for instance, TNA: DO 153/62 "Soviet Professor for Legon," *Daily Graphic*, 20 February 1964; and, "Professor to work here," *Ghanaian Times*, 20 February, 1964.

[328] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Report "Note on Talk with Vice-Chancellor at Legon" by Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, 25 February 1964 and TNA: DO 153/62, Confidential Letter from J. Chadwick, Commonwealth Relations Office, London, to Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner to Ghana, Accra, 22 April, 1964.

academics with the requisite language skill to teach in Ghana.[329] Nkrumah's retort that he would find the people to teach the students when confronted with the fact of the rate of attrition of Western expatriate staff at the universities was therefore a bold claim, more aspirational in its intent than in reality.[330] When a steady stream of the Western expatriates resigned or threatened to resign because of deportation orders issued against six of them in early 1964,[331] the Minister of Education, Kwaku Boateng, who was also the chair of the governing councils of the universities, made overtures at persuading them to stay as the vacancies their resignations would create could not be easily filled.[332]

The government took other steps to control the universities. It pressured the universities to organize civic education classes for students, though the university authorities and the students blunted the intent of this move. A CPP-sponsored demonstration against the "arrogance" and "anti-state attitudes of [university] students, lecturers and professors" at the University in Legon forced the issue on the university. Connor Cruise O'Brien, the vice-chancellor of the University of Ghana, refused university responsibility for the teaching of the course but settled for a series of lectures under the title "Education for

[329] TNA: DO 153/63 Confidential Report "Universities" by H. Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, 15 December 1964.

[330] See TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Report "Note on Talk with Vice-Chancellor at Legon" by Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, 25 February 1964 and TNA: DO 153/62, Confidential Letter from J. Chadwick, Commonwealth Relations Office, London, to Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner to Ghana, Accra, 22 April, 1964.

[331] TNA: DO 153/62 Ghana Press Release: Deportation Orders against Six Lecturers, Issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on behalf of the Ministry of Interior, 8 February 1964 and TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Internal Memo on the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology from A.H. G. Amy, British High Commission, Accra, 20 March, 1964.

[332] TNA: DO 153/62 Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964.

Citizenship" to be given on a regular basis in the university by party activists.[333] The civics course was treated as an extra-curricular activity and student participation was voluntary,[334] a leeway that denied it the importance that the ruling party had sought for it in the universities' curriculum. This model of the course was adopted for the other institutions in Cape Coast and Kumasi under the coordination of the Minister of Defence, Kofi Baako.[335] The education for citizenship program may have made some converts among the students to the CPP cause, but it did not elicit the widespread enthusiasm from students that the ruling party and government were seeking. The hours-long harangue over several topics that was the characteristic format of the lecture sometimes received "ironic clapping and laughter" from the students, much to the annoyance of party activists.[336] The greater resistance the program faced among students, the more strident the ruling party became in bringing them to heel. The frequency of civic education lectures increased on the campuses of the universities, and they were coupled with rallies and a vigorous movement to set up student branches of the party in all the universities. The *Ghanaian Times* expressed the hope that the setting up of party branches would mark a "decisive turn in the process of integrating the intellectual community with the political

[333] "Big Demonstration at Varsity: Down with Academic Arrogance", *Ghanaian Times*, 10 February 1964. Also see, "Down with Colonial Mentality at Our universities," front page comment, *Evening News*, 7 February 1964.

[334] TNA: DO 153/62 Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964.

[335] TNA: DO 153/62 Ghana News Agency News Release: Universities, 12 March 1964, and "Varsity Party men hold talks on civic education," *Ghanaian Times*, 13 March 1964,

[336] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Dispatch from R. Thomas, British High Commission, Accra, to E. Wool-Lewis, Commonwealth Relations Office, London, 7 March, 1964. Also see student and faculty responses to an intemperate lecture by Kofi Batsa, editor of *The Spark*, at the University of Ghana in early April1964 in TNA: DO 153/62 *Echo*, 9 May 1964.

aims of the nation."[337] The state media reported and celebrated the rallies and the establishment of the student branches with much fanfare.[338] These were also occasions for much discoursing and dialectical analysis in the mass media about the role of education and educated youth in post-colonial nation building, and especially in a socialist state.[339]

While the possible leverage of university branches of the party was being exploited, the government adopted a more direct approach to curbing the influence of unsympathetic academics within the universities and compelling the mainstream student body to be pro-CPP. President Nkrumah sought to assert the right of veto over all heads of department appointments as chancellor.[340] This strategy was of a piece with his pressure to have some pro-CPP faculty promoted in the Ghanaian professoriate.[341] He demanded an annual review of the performance of students as the basis for continuing scholarship support. He also proposed, contrary to the existing procedure, the setting up of a special

[337] TNA: DO 153/63 "Focus on the peoples universities," *Ghanaian Times*, 24 October 1964.

[338] See "Legon Rocks as Party Branch Opens," *Ghanaian Times*, 19 October 1964; "Varsity Boys Must serve the people", *Ghanaian Times*, 19 October 1964; "Party Branch for Legon," *Daily Graphic*, 19 October 1964; and, "Cape Coast Varsity Gets Party Branch," *Ghanaian Times*, 10 November 1964.

[339] See Kofi Baako, "We need educated and honest youth," *Ghanaian Times*, 24 October 1964; Kodwo Addison, "Be active in the revolution," *Ghanaian Times*, 24 October 1964, and, Willie Abraham, "Political education is essential," *Ghanaian Times*, 24 October 1964.

[340] TNA: DO 153/62 Kwame Nkrumah's letter to Connor Cruise O'Brien, Vice-Chancellor of University of Ghana, 27 January 1964.

[341] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Memo from R. Thomas, British High Commission, Accra to C. E. Wool-Lewis, Commonwealth Relations Office, 18 April 1964. Nkrumah had been piling pressure on the University of Ghana to promote to full professors William Abraham, Yaw Manu and Ekow Daniels. The Vice-Chancellor relented after much pressure and acquiesced in the promotion of Abraham and Manu, if the appointments board so wished, but he continued to oppose the promotion of Ekow Daniels and Nkrumah accepted O'Brien's position.

committee under the National Scholarship Secretariat to conduct the review of students for the granting of scholarships. The new committee would grant or renew student scholarships based not only on academic performance but also on "good conduct."[342] Though Nkrumah didn't explain what would constitute "good conduct" on the part of students in his letter to the university authorities, the *Ghanaian Times* left no doubt as to what that entailed. The paper editorialized that the "hallmark of good conduct in our Universities…should be close identification with the spirit and objects of the Party."[343] The aim then was to use academic scholarships to cultivate a higher education student body that was largely pro-CPP.

In moves that became characteristic of the time, the universities authorities carefully parried the political onslaught sometimes temporarily, at other times with more permanent results. The authorities at the University of Ghana led the charge to assert university autonomy. While agreeing with the President that student and faculty academic performance should be subjected to review, O'Brien asserted that this was ongoing under the existing university statutes. He insisted on the university having primary responsibility for any further reviews that may be necessary. He accepted the chancellor's involvement in appointment of heads of departments but insisted that this had to be subsidiary to the overall authority of the university council as the statutes dictated, and if

[342] TNA: DO 153/62 Kwame Nkrumah's letter to Connor Cruise O'Brien, Vice-Chancellor of University of Ghana, 27 January 1964.

[343] "Universities and the People", editorial, *Ghanaian Times*, 6 February, 1964. The use of a dual voice in the CPP government's communications, whereby official correspondence was sometimes cryptic while the state newspapers gave full expression to official thinking became common in the 1960s as could be seen, for instance, in the government's diplomatic communications. See Obed Asamoah, "Nkrumah's Foreign Policy", in *Life and Work of Kwame Nkrumah*, 249.

there were to be any changes, the university council had the power to make those changes.[344] The recourse to the statutes of the university and the assertion of the university's primary responsibility for all reviews of faculty and students pushed the Nkrumah government into corner as it wanted to avoid any obvious appearances of breaching the law. In a sign of the victory for the universities, Nkrumah wrote back asking that discussion of his demands should be suspended and the epistolary exchange between his office and the university authorities should come to an end.[345]

Remaining unresolved during this period was the larger contention about academic freedom in the institutions of higher learning. While the debate in and of itself carried its own merit, it also turned on the relevance of academic freedom for the training and cultivation of civic-minded educated youth. To the CPP state of the 1960s, academic freedom in Ghana's institutions of higher education could only be meaningful when it was subject to its ideal of producing socialist-minded youths, though this was often framed in nationalist and pan-Africanist terms. The authorities of the universities generally thought that the proper education of Ghanaian youth rested on unfettered freedom for both faculty and students in the institutions of higher learning in their pursuit of knowledge. In a sign of the state's frustration at not having its way over on this question, Ghana's attorney general, B. E. Kwaw-Swanzy, warned in March 1964 that the universities were to do the bidding of the state because the state, using public resources,

[344] TNA: DO 153/62 Letter from Connor Cruise O'Brien, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana to Kwame Nkrumah, 29 January 1964.

[345] TNA: DO 153/62 Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964.

paid for them. He justified this restrictive view of academic freedom on the grounds that "youth must be trained to live in accordance with the Nation's philosophy."[346] The attorney-general's warning in an address to students at the Founder's Day ceremony in Achimota School was the latest expression of what had become a widespread view in government circles though it was often expressed with more sophistication than a simple 'he who pays the piper, calls the tune.' In a "root and branch" response, as a diplomatic observer put it, Vice-Chancellor Cruise O'Brien likened the attorney-general's view to that of the apartheid government in South Africa ordering teachers in that country to teach its racist doctrines in schools because it paid the teachers. While conceding that it was the universities' responsibility to produce graduates for the country's development, O'Brien insisted in his address at the graduation ceremony of 1964 that "only a university where well-qualified teachers can work freely in congenial conditions can produce such graduates". He rejected claims by CPP activists that the universities are hiding behind concerns or assertions for academic freedom to promote colonialist or neo-colonialist objectives.[347] Not all in the ranks of the faculty or administration of the universities shared O'Brien's version of academic freedom. Thomas Hodgkin, the leading Africanist and director of the newly created Institute of African Studies, said in private quarters that O'Brien's take on academic freedom was "too platonic" and absolutist. Hodgkin cherished university autonomy but wanted to avoid flashy speeches that would bring

[346] TNA: DO 153/62 Summary of developments with respect to the universities, British High Commission, Accra [undated but internal evidence indicate the summary was compiled shortly after 7th March 1964, when the attorney general made his speech.]

[347] TNA: DO 153/62 Vice-Chancellor's Address to Congregation, University of Ghana, 14 March 1964.

down the power of the state on the universities.[348] The Egyptian principal of the University College of Cape Coast, Dr. N. G. Bakhoom, who was also a close ally of Kwame Nkrumah, took a position on the matter that was more in line with the CPP's view. On the occasion of the setting up of a student branch of the CPP at his university college, Bakhoom asserted the primacy of the ruling party's dictates in higher education in the country.[349]

These notwithstanding, O'Brien reflected the broader view in faculty and administrative circles within Ghanaian universities about academic freedom. The response from the government and party activists clearly suggested that they saw his comments as reflective of a consensus in the universities. The comparison he made between the demands of the CPP government on the universities and the apartheid regime in South Africa particularly stung and elicited vigorous counter-arguments and some vituperation from government circles.[350] Kofi Baako, the minister of defence, said in a lecture days after the vice-chancellor's graduation speech that government believed in academic freedom but not the kind that would divorce the universities from society or produce educated youth whose ideas were contrary to the general wellbeing. He said the ultimate concern of government was "the content of education given to the country's youth". Academic freedom could only be meaningful if it satisfied the aspirations or met the needs of the people, Baako

[348] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Report by Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, 18 March 1964.

[349] "Cape Coast Varsity Gets Party Branch," *Ghanaian Times*, 10 November, 1964.

[350] For the vituperative responses, see, for instance, 'Baby Rabbit's column in *Ghanaian Times*, 19 March, 1964, which obliquely called Connor Cruise O'Brien an "upstart of a Katanga idiot", a reference to O'Brien's work as UN representative during the crisis in the Congo in 1961.

argued. In a reiteration of the attorney general's view, Baako opined that a proper functioning of academic freedom could occur only when those "who have the responsibility of teaching the youth try to understand those who foot the bill of the universities."[351] The party press found O'Brien's assertions about academic freedom unrealistic, and declaimed his speech as an abdication of the universities' role in Ghana's development, for which a seven-year plan had been launched early in that year.[352]

The question of the relationship between university autonomy, academic freedom, the production of educated and civic-minded youth, and Ghana's development remained an important one for the country even beyond the CPP years. It generated as much attention in the Ghanaian public sphere in the post-Nkrumah era even if the level of debate was not as intense at it was in the early decade of the country's independence. The vigorous participation of Ghanaian university students in these contentions would help consolidate the view of students as a vanguard. Student response and involvement in the contentious politics of the early decade of independence was not monolithic. While the mainstream student organization, the NUGS, and the general tenor of students tended towards autonomy and opposition to the state, there were others who were loyalists of the CPP state. Student involvement in the confrontational politics of the Nkrumah period would set the tone for the political radicalization of student culture on the university campuses.

[351] "Don't Misuse Academic Freedom," *Ghanaian Times*, 19 March, 1964.

[352] "We Disagree (Our critical analysis of the Convocation Speech by Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien on 14 March 1964 at Legon), *The Spark*, 17 March, 1964, 1-3. Also see "Our Universities in the New Era," *Ghanaian Times*, 16 March 1964.

Out of this campus culture would emerge students who were fully attuned to and influential in the country's popular politics.

The CPP State and Student Activism

As the Nkrumah government turned authoritarian, student political activism became the main site of critique of the dictatorial exercise of power. The students took on the government over various issues, whether they were peculiar to the universities or of general national interest. This was particularly important in the early to mid 1960s when a formal political opposition to the CPP government had either been considerably weakened or officially abolished. The NUGS trained its eyes on the creeping authoritarianism of the government. At its second annual congress in December 1963, the student organization publically condemned the government's dismissal of the chief justice, Kobina Arku Korsah, and two other justices of Ghana's Supreme Court for the acquittal of three of the five defendants who were accused of an assassination attempt on Nkrumah in August in the previous year at Kulungu. The three, Tawia Adamafio, Ako Adjei and H.H. Coffie-Crabbe, all former members of the CPP government, were tried for treason by a special court and found not guilty, a decision that displeased Nkrumah. The NUGS pointed out that the dismissal of the chief justice, who presided over the trial, set a bad precedent and undermined public confidence in the law. The national student organization also questioned the professionalism and ethics of the Attorney General, B. E. Kwaw Swanzy, who held a press conference shortly after the trial in which he attacked the integrity of the trial judges and the judiciary. The NUGS congress asserted that its position against the government was "[i]n view of Ghana's role in the leadership ranks of

the African Continent," and of the country's "duty to set examples on clean democratic li[n]es."[353] The suggestion that Nkrumah's government was falling short of its African leadership role and setting a bad example for the rest of the continent was particularly galling for a government that took its pan-Africanist credentials seriously. The charges of undemocratic actions would become characteristic of the NUG's criticisms of government throughout the remainder of the CPP administration. The Nkrumah government would not take these criticisms lightly.[354] Closer home, the students protested the detention and deportation of Ghanaian and expatriate academics at the universities by the government for unspecified acts of subversion.[355] They followed this with a denunciation of the government's closure of the universities for about two and half weeks in late January and early February 1964 during the national referendum on the one-party state. The government's reason for the closure was ostensibly to allow the students and staff of the universities to go to their home districts to vote but, as the students correctly pointed out, the closure was meant to forestall any organized student opposition to the referendum or other governmental action during the period which would have been easy to coordinate if the students were on campus. Less than five percent of the student population of about 2,080 in the three universities was registered as voters

[353] TNA: DO 153/62 Resolution on the Treason Trial by the Second Annual Congress of the National Union of Ghana Students, Legon, 22 December 1963. For details of the attorney general's press conference see, "A Mockery of Justice," *The Spark*, 11 December 1963.

[354] See TNA: DO 153/62 Secret Memo to R. T. Thomas, Deputy British High Commissioner, 14 February 1964.

[355] TNA: DO 153/62 Open letter from the National Union of Ghana Students [signed by its president NIY Fiagbe] to Government of Ghana, (undated, but from internal evidence it was written shortly after government announced the closure of the universities on 17 January, 1964); and, Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964. The arrested academics were Dr. J. C. de Graft-Johnson, B.D.G. Folson, all Ghanaians, and Dr. Denis Osborne, a Briton.

and about 90% of the academic staff were expatriates so closure of the universities could hardly be justified on the grounds that government gave. The students were also worried about the financial implications of traveling home for two weeks during the term and the disruption to the academic calendar the closure entailed.[356] The students had initially planned to demonstrate against the closure of the universities but settled for the open denunciations of government when counseled by the authorities of the universities to avoid direct confrontation with government.[357]

The government's response to student criticisms clearly indicated the influence and impact of the students. The government saw the universities and student political activism as the last bastions of opposition to CPP dominance of Ghanaian politics. The indirect pressure and tactics to bring the students to heel in the early years of Nkrumah gave way to direct intimidation and police arrests. In addition to further arrests and deportations of expatriate academics in the universities,[358] the government arrested five student leaders in January and February of 1964. President Nkrumah personally gave the order for the arrest of the student leaders, as Ben Forjoe, the deputy head of the state's national investigative arm, the Special Branch, divulged in private quarters. The students were to be questioned about the NUGS' criticisms of government, especially the

[356] TNA: DO 153/62 Open letter from the National Union of Ghana Students to the Government of Ghana (undated, but from internal evidence it was written shortly after the government announced the closure of the universities on 17 January, 1964).

[357] See TNA: DO 153/62 Secret Savingram from British High Commission, Accra, to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, London, 8 February 1964.

[358] TNA: DO153/62 Ghana Press Release NO. 66/64: Deportation Orders Against Six Lecturers, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on behalf of the Ministry of Interior, 8 February 1964. The six academics were W.B. Harvey, R.B. Seidman, G. Greco, J.P. Wendel, L. H. Schuster, and J.V. Stewart.

criticisms of executive interference of the judiciary in December of 1963.[359] The arrested student leaders included N.I.Y. Fiagbe, president of the NUGS; A.K.P. Kludze, president of the Federation of West African Students (FWAS) and the previous year's president of the NUGS, and G.K. Antwi, the previous year's General Secretary of the NUGS.[360] Fiagbe, as president of the NUGS, had been the main face in the NUGS' agitations against government in 1963 and 1964.[361] Kludze, said to be "for long an open defender of academic freedom" had carried over his activism as president of the NUGS in the previous year into the FWAS, and was seen by government as one of the brains behind student politics and agitation against it.[362] He was the first student leader to be arrested in January, which was a source of considerable unrest among the student body.[363] The arrests were complemented with government-sponsored demonstrations against the university students. Early in the day on 8th February 1964, about 1500 supporters of the ruling party were bussed to the campus of the University of Ghana where they held a demonstration denouncing the students for their anti-government stances, "academic arrogance" and "isolationism". The party demonstrators also moved through the various student residential halls breaking windows, and smashing utensils and lights. The admonition of the university's vice-chancellor, O'Brien, to the students and the

[359] TNA: DO 153/62 Secret Memo to R. T. Thomas, Deputy British High Commissioner, 14 February 1964.

[360] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964.

[361] See, for, instance, TNA: DO 153/62 Open letter from the National Union of Ghana Students to Government of Ghana, (undated, but from internal evidence it was written shortly after government announced the closure of the universities on 17 January, 1964).

[362] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Dispatch from Harold Smedley, British High Commissioner, Accra, to the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations, London, 12 June 1964.

[363] TNA: DO 153/62 Letter from students of the University of Ghana to Kwame Nkrumah, 6 February 1964.

intervention of the police were what prevented a physical showdown between the party demonstrators and the students.[364]

A pattern of government intimidation and threats, on one hand, and student response in the form of greater organizing and activism, on the other hand, would characterize the relations between the two in what turned out to be the final years of the Nkrumah government. Student opposition to the Nkrumah government would also lay the groundwork and provide a blue print for future student political activism. Besides keeping the arrested student leaders in prison without trial for a few months, the Nkrumah government also tried to break the back of the National Union of Ghana Students by setting up a rival student group. In early 1965, the government-sponsored Ghana National Students Organization (GHANASO) was launched with a lot of fanfare. Its purpose, as reported in the state press, was to promote the voice of "a progressive student body" that shared the socialist ideas and ideals of the CPP government.[365] The government's aim in supporting the establishment of GHANASO was to dislodge the NUGS as the lead organization in the student movement and thereby take away a vital source of opposition.[366] In a similar move, the government sought to take over the JCRs

[364] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Telegram from R. Thomas [British High Commission, Accra] to Martin or Chadwick, Commonwealth Relations Office, London, 8 February 1964; "Big Demonstration at Varsity: DOWN WITH ACADEMIC ARROGANCE!," *Ghanaian Times*, 10 February 1964. The newspaper enthusiastically reported the demonstration, mentioning the "thousands of placard-bearing demonstrators" and the march through the halls but made no mention of the destruction of students' and university property.

[365] Kweku Yakubu, "Our students and the African Revolution," *The Spark*, 5 February 1965.

[366] TNA: DO 153/63 "Wanted in Ghana: A Socialist Students' Movement," *The African Student* 2, November 1964-January 1965, and Kweku Yakubu, "Our students and the African Revolution," *The Spark*, 5 February 1965.

of the universities by sponsoring students who were amenable to its ideas to contest the elections for JCR leaders.[367]

The efforts by government to supplant the independent student movement with government-sponsored groups rather strengthened the mainstream student body, the NUGS, and its affiliate organizations, to craft an independent political space for the students in national politics. Student demonstrations and protest against the arrest of student leaders became commonplace in the three universities. Most importantly, government intimidation compelled greater coordination and organization of student action by their leaders. In the absence of the arrested student leaders in 1964, others stepped in to coordinate student opposition to the government. One such student, Kwame Akuoku Sarpong, a law student at the University of Ghana and one-time editor of Commonwealth Hall's *Echo*, spearheaded the national coordination efforts throughout 1964.[368] Sarpong, a self-described Troskyite who saw the CPP's socialism as fake, soundly defeated Modibo Tawia Ocran, a fellow law student and stalwart of the CPP on campus, in the JCR elections of the Commonwealth Hall of the University of Ghana in 1964. Modibo Ocran was the founding editor of the government-supported *African Student*, published out of Commonwealth Hall, which became a channel for pro-CPP views on the university campuses.[369] Sarpong's victory signaled the students' rebuff of

[367] Colin Essamuah, "Nana Akuoku Sarpong: Uncommon Politician (Part 2)," *Daily Graphic*, 10 May 2014.

[368] TNA: DO 153/62 Confidential Report on Internal Situation in Ghana from British High Commission, Accra to Commonwealth Relations Office, 15 April 1964.

[369] See TNA: DO 153/63 *The African Student*, October 1965 and *The African Student* Vol. 2, November 1964-January 1965.

the government's attempt to infiltrate and control the JCRs. Other JCRs rejected all candidates that had the taint of the government support in their elections. Sarpong therefore brought to coordinating work popularity and support from his fellow students. Short stints in the cells of the Special Branch throughout 1964 and 1965 for acts deemed critical of the government only added to Sarpong's status "as the physical symbol of the perennial struggle by students to handle their own affairs without interference, whether from the university authorities on campus or the powers that [were] off-campus."[370] The students' resistance to governments attempts to break their front and the successful promotion of an independent student movement made them anything but mere spectators and secondary actors in the politics of the period.

Conclusion

On February 24, 1966, when the government of Kwame Nkrumah was removed from power in a coup d'état, Ghanaian university students were among those who jubilated at the moment. John Schram, a student of the University of Ghana, recalls that "[t]he campus – and the capital, Accra – erupted as cheering crowds danced in euphoric and spontaneous celebration."[371] This was not surprising given the antagonistic relationship that had come to exist between Nkrumah's government and the budding student movement, led by the National Union of Ghana Students, since the early 1960s. Contrary

[370] Colin Essamuah, "Nana Akuoku Sarpong: Uncommon Politician (Part 2)," *Daily Graphic*, 10 May 2014. It is a testament to the formative influence of the student politics of the 1960s that Kwame Akuoku Sarpong and Modibo Tawia Ocran, in addition to many others from that period, would continue to play important roles in Ghanaian politics. Sarpong became a chief and politician, occupying parliamentary and ministerial positions under various national administrations from the 1970s to recent times. He is still the paramount chief of Agogo in Ashanti. Modibo Tawia Ocran became a legal academic, international civil servant, government advisor, and a justice of Ghana's Supreme Court.

[371] Schram, "Where Ghana Went Right."

to the existing scholarship, student activism in this period constituted a critical part of national politics. In the context of a weak or absent formal opposition to the government of the CPP, students constituted the informal opposition. The government's attempts to bring the universities and the students to heel were in recognition of this fact. Student activism in the Nkrumah period would lay the foundations for the political engagement of students in national affairs in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Chapter 5

"Who can best rule a Nation – the youth or age?": The national politics of students and youth in the post-Nkrumah era, c. 1966-1979

In the early months of 1969, Ghana's military junta, the National Liberation Council (NLC), pressed on with plans for a general election to return the country to civilian democratic rule at the end of the year. The NLC had come to power after the successful coup d'état against the government of Kwame Nkrumah, post-independent Ghana's first leader, in February of 1966. In the speculative discussions among Ghanaians about the future civilian government, the question of its generational composition was an issue. The generational question appears to have been provoked by the provision in the newly promulgated national constitution, which set the required age for candidates in the impending presidential election at 40 and thus effectively disbarred as a candidate the head of the military junta, General Akwasi Afrifa, who in the tenaciously gerontocratic political culture of the country was a mere young man. General Afrifa was 33 years at the time.[372] Some voices in the national conversation argued for a future government dominated by a younger generation of Ghanaians. Provoked by this "gospel of youth leadership", a columnist in the country's leading weekend newspaper, the *Sunday Mirror*, retorted that "much myth and fog have gathered in recent months around the subject of youth leadership which a kindly needle had better prick burst!" In response to his own question, "Who can best rule a Nation – the youth or age?", the columnist, Togbi Yao

[372] "The Chairman's Home is his Castle," *Sunday Mirror*, 22 June 1969. In the article, the *Mirror* said of Afrifa that as the youngest Head of State, Ghanaians, especially the youth are proud of him". In a letter to another Ghanaian military junta head in 1978, then retired General Afrifa, in what sounded like a complaint, made reference to how he was made to "sign the 1969 constitution that disqualified me on the grounds of AGE?" See "Afrifa's Personal Letter to Kutu," *Daily Graphic*, 1 February 1978 and "Afrifa's Letter to General Acheampong," *The Mirror*, 10 February 1978. On the age qualification issue in the constitutional discussions leading to the August 1969 election, see Obed Asamoah, *The Political History of Ghana (1950-2013): The Experience of a Non-Conformist* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2014), 145.

(probably a pseudonym), opined that the "maturity", "deliberateness" and "wisdom" needed for national leadership were often borne of experience, which the older generation were privileged to have, while the youth have "impetuosity; romantic (quixotic) vision; one-sided viewpoint and much else besides – all of which may be useful in gingering up the social ferment, but wholly unsuitable as ingredients for national leadership". Political developments in Ghana in the late 1950s and 1960s, under the Kwame Nkrumah-led Convention People's Party government, confirmed Togbi Yao in his pro-gerontocratic views. He declaimed:

> Who said that Ghana had not experienced the leadership of youth? Why! the leadership of the former regime was youth. Look at the average age of the cabinet of Nkrumah's government. And because youth sees but half[,] that leadership of recent past considered that what they saw was the whole and the only truth….That youthful leadership rammed down our throats the one-track views of a mere handful of the leaders.…If, therefore, those who disturb the peace by empty claims for youth have nothing else to say, let them not say it here.[373]

Youth had been implicated in Ghana's national agenda and governance since 1957, when the country gained independence under the Convention People's Party.[374] The dynamics of the final phase of the Independence struggle in which the CPP, widely regarded as the party of commoners and youth, triumphed made the dominance of youth in the public sphere of the emergent nation-state not unusual. The CPP would go on to make youth a central plank in its nation-building agenda, and that in turn made the 'youth question' an important one for post-colonial Ghanaian governments even beyond the Nkrumah years.

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[373] Togbi Yao, "Youth Sees But Half", *Sunday Mirror*, 4 May 1969. The columnist's name hinted at his pro-gerontocratic politics. Togbe is an Ewe word which means "chief".

[374] See Chapter 4.

Togbi Yao's 1969 question – "Who can best rule a Nation – the youth or age"? – in the columns of the *Sunday Mirror* was thus one of the major interrogatories, which acknowledged the presence of youth, in various iterations, at the heart of the wider politics of the post-independent nation. The generational discourse to which the columnist was a forceful contributor in the late 1960s was not marginal in debates about the political future of Ghana in the post-independence period. These debates, centering on the political course and the development path of the young nation, were carried on in the name of the youth. In terms of national significance, the political activism of university students was the expression of youth politics that came closest to answering Togbe Yao's question in the late 1960s and the 1970s, though not in those Manichaean terms. It was in this period that a national student movement, borne of student activism in the Nkrumah era, established itself as a central part of the country's evolving political order. In representing the interests of Ghanaians in sustained challenges to the managers of the Ghanaian state over the period, students – as individuals, groups and organizations – under the general leadership of the National Union of Ghana Students became a movement. The students were engaged in contentious politics, which Sidney Tarrow defines as "collective activity on the part of claimants – or those who claim to represent them – relying at least in part on noninstitutional forms of interactions with elite, opponents or the state."[375] In the context of successive changes in government and an alternation between civilian and military rule in the late 1960s and 1970s, student activism pushed for a participatory governance model at the national level in which the

[375] Sidney Tarrow, "Social Movements in Contentious Politics: A Review Article," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (December 1996), 874. I draw on this source for my working definition of a social movement.

voices of youth were to be taken seriously. Students crafted an independent role of articulating public interests and demanding political reforms in national politics.

In contrast to the sporadic and less historical literature inspired by the global student and youth protests of the late 1960s,[376] there is a growing literature that assigns political salience to African students and youth, in terms of activism, in the 1960s and 1970s. In this recent literature, African students and youth are, on one hand, represented as instruments of socio- economic transformation while, on the other hand, they have generated widespread social anxieties in the context of the economic and political decline that plagued many African states after the optimistic years of independence. These anxieties were largely due to African youths sometimes violent and anti-social interventions or intrusions into the politics of their countries.[377] Representations of post-colonial youth in recent African history as vanguard and vandals or makers and breakers among other such binary descriptors have become all too common in the literature.[378]

Though Ghana has not experienced any of the violent youth political irruptions that have plagued some African countries, scholarly examination of student and youth activism in national politics in post-Nkrumah Ghana has largely been in relation to the political crises

[376] See Chapter 3, and Hanna, *University Students and African Politics* and Barkan, *An African Dilemma.*

[377] Diouf, "African Youth and Public Space', 3.

[378] See, for instance, Jon Abbink and Ineke van Kessel, eds., *Vanguard or Vandals: Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005), Alcinda Honwana and Filip de Boeck, eds., *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa* (Oxford, UK: James Currey, 2005), Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction" and Ismail Rashid, "Student Radicals, Lumpen Youth, and the Origins of Revolutionary Groups in Sierra Leone, 1977-1996," in *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, ed. Ibrahim Abdullah (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004), 66-89.

of the late 1970s and in terms that represent student and youth activism as ephemeral. Albert Adu Boahen and Paul Nugent, for instance, mention in their separate works that students played a role in the opposition to the regime of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) in the late 1970s when the SMC made attempts to extend its stay in power by promoting the idea of a non-party governance system made up of an alliance among the military, police and civilians; an idea that became popularly known as Union Government (UNIGOV).[379] Boahen, in another work, claims that students played "no small role" in the military overthrow of the civilian government of Prime Minister Kofi Abrefa Busia in 1972.[380] This could only mean the support the students gave to the coup when it occurred and not that they played any role in the planning and execution of the coup as there is no evidence to that effect.[381] Most importantly, Boahen's and Nugent's perspective represents student political activism as necessarily episodic or transitory – a phenomenon that came to the fore only in those times of political crisis. It fails to track and explain the long-term evolution of Ghanaian student politics and activism and how students came to be important players in the crises of the late 1970s.

Bucking the trend, Maxwell Owusu offers a view in which Ghanaian students and youth are more than episodic or marginal players in the postcolonial period of the 1960s and

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[379] Albert Adu Boahen, *The Ghanaian Sphinx: Reflections on the Contemporary History of Ghana, 1972-1987* (Accra, Ghana: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1989) and Paul Nugent, *Big Men, Small Boys and Politics in Ghana: Power, Ideology and the Burden of History, 1982-1994* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1996).

[380] Boahen, introduction to *The Role of African Student*, 20. Boahen gives 1971 as the date of the coup but it actually occurred on January 13, 1972.

[381] Boahen's political affection for the Busia government may have influenced the way he frames students' involvement in its overthrow. See "Boahen on the coup," *Daily Graphic*, 14 February 1972.

70s. He sees in post-colonial Ghanaian youth politics the promotion and guarantee of the historically founded "jural postulates" which formed the basis of commoners' rights in the pre-colonial and colonial period. These rights included the right to question or rebel against authority, remove unwanted leaders from power, and check the abuses of those in power. The articulation of these jural postulates, according to Owusu, was the mechanism for "social and political ordering". [382] Hence youth political activism has been central in the shaping of post-colonial Ghana's political culture. In a separate article, Owusu interprets the military revolts and coup d'état of the late 1970s as having historical connections to a pre-colonial and colonial tradition of popular politics. He contends that the coups shared logical, ideological and symbolic continuities with the Asafo risings of the colonial period, for instance.[383] In this perspective, youth politics, such as undergirded the coup, was the main means by which the popular political tradition was maintained in the postcolonial period. More importantly, he argues that since Nkrumah was removed from power in 1966

> students have increasingly assumed the independent political role that the Asafo saw as its major responsibility. Students have demonstrated that they have little allegiance to the government of the day; they are the first to revolt against bad governments. The student movement, from the student point of view, [is]…speaking for the public interest.[384]

[382] Maxwell Owusu, "Custom and Coups: A Juridical Interpretation of Civil Order and Disorder in Ghana," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 24, no. 1 (Mar. 1986), 70-71.

[383] Maxwell Owusu, "Rebellion, Revolution, and Tradition: Reinterpreting Coups in Ghana," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (Apr. 1989), 375. Also see Chapter 1.

[384] Maxwell Owusu, "Rebellion, Revolution and Tradition", 386.

Owusu does not explore these important insights in a full historical examination of student and youth politics between 1966 and the late 1970s, and he is narrowly focused on the post-colonial continuities of the pre-colonial and colonial Asafo tradition, particularly its "rituals of rebellion". Yet his arguments serve as an inspiration and important point of departure for a fuller examination of youth and popular politics in post-Nkrumah Ghana. Owusu's work and surveys of the kind that Naomi Chazan used for her scholarly examination of the political socialization and attitudes of Ghanaian youth of the early 1970s indicate significant politicization of Ghanaian youth. The activism of student groups like the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) represented the interest of youth in national politics.[385]

This chapter examines student and youth activism in national politics in the period after the overthrow of the CPP government in 1966 to 1979 when the military regime of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) took over the reins of government after a successful coup against another military regime, the Supreme Military Council (SMC). The activism of students in this period sustained a tradition of popular politics in which government was held accountable. Student involvement in Ghanaian national politics from the late 1960s to the late 1970s was conditioned by several factors which included the tradition of activism carried over from the Nkrumah period, general political and economic decline including deteriorating conditions on the campuses of the universities as well as governments' inability to deal with these problems amidst popular charges of

[385] Naomi Chazan, "Political Culture and Socialization to Politics: A Ghanaian Case," *The Review of Politics* 40, no. 1 (1978): 3-31. Also see Naomi Chazan, *An Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics: Managing Political Recession, 1969-1982* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983).

political corruption and governmental attempts to suppress dissent and criticism. International developments such as the global youth protests of the late 1960s, Cold War politics, and the appeal of leftist internationalism and critiques of neo-liberalism among radical student groups reinforced these factors. As noted already, Ghana alternated between democratic and military rule in this period: there was the military regime of the National Liberation Council (NLC), which overthrew the Nkrumah government in 1966 and handed over power to a civilian administration after elections in 1969; the civilian government of Prime Minister Kofi Abrefa Busia, from 1969 to 1972; and the military regimes of the National Redemption Council (1972-1975), Supreme Military Council (SMC I and II, 1975-1979), and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, which took power after the coup in June 1979.[386]

The universities and student culture in post-Nkrumah times: continuity and change

In their structures and internal procedures, Ghana's universities largely retained autonomy throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s. In contrast to the political interference of the Nkrumah government in the running of these institutions of higher education, the various post-Nkrumah regimes avoided any overt attempts at control. They provided general supervision and support. The general decline in the economic fortunes of the country, however, led to gradual reduction in budgetary support from the state to the universities, which undermined the proper functioning of these institutions.[387] The

[386] For accounts of some of the broad historical developments of this period see Roger Gocking, *The History of Ghana* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), Alex Kwaku Danso-Boafo, *The Political Biography of Dr. Kofi Abrefa Busia* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1996) Chazan, *An Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics*; Boahen, *The Ghanaian Sphinx.*

[387] Manuh, Gariba and Budu, *Ghana's Publicly Funded Universities*, 40.

general economic decline and its effects on the universities would be a factor in students' political engagement with the various governments in the 1970s and that in turn generated governmental interest in the political activities of students.

Among the teaching staff and students, there was a keen interest in national politics especially because of the Nkrumah-era experience. Critical discussions on the campuses about what went wrong under Nkrumah and the desire to prevent a dictatorship from emerging again would lead to the establishment of various campus groupings such as the Legon Society for National Affairs (LSNA) at the University of Ghana in March 1966. Bringing together a number of lecturers and professors, the LSNA set itself the task of serving in an informal advisory capacity to the military regime of the NLC and subsequent governments on major problems confronting the nation. A. K. P Kludze, one of the student leaders who were arrested under the Nkrumah government served as the secretary of the Legon Society. In his memoirs, Obed Yao Asamoah, a member of the society, recalls that the LSNA became a launching pad for many of its members' involvement in national politics in the 1970s and beyond. The members were particularly influential in the debates around the plans of the NLC to return the country to democratic rule in 1969.[388]

The political radicalization of student culture on the university campuses that began under the CPP government continued after the overthrow of Nkrumah. Informal networks of study and discussion devoted to politics and ideology, and which involved students

[388] Asamoah, *The Experience of a Non-Conformist*, 155-175.

and professors on the campuses, flourished in the post-Nkrumah period. So also did the campus journalism that countered the state media of the previous era. The intellectual networks and the campus periodicals continued to provide opportunities for the circulation and debate of ideas among students and proved very popular and influential. In the 1970s, amidst the turbulent politics of Ghana and its worsening socio-economic conditions, the informal intellectual networks of discussion cells, study groups and clubs on the university campuses became important sites for interaction and reflections on the problems and fortunes of Ghana and the developing world. Pre-existing periodicals such as the *Echo, Siren* and *Legonite* provided space for reportage and discussion. New ones were added to them. The Legon Society for National Affairs published the *Legon Observer*, which quickly established itself as a serious forum for debating issues of national importance. In addition to these regular journals were the occasional ones such as the *Aluta* magazine published by the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) in the late 1970s during the students' campaigns against the military regime of the Supreme Military Council.[389]

The discussion cells and study groups on campus proved particularly conducive for the spread of leftist ideas. This ideological development in Ghanaian universities reflected and was reinforced by similar trends in higher education in other parts of the continent. The physical presence and work of leftist intellectuals such as Walter Rodney, Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul in Tanzania, for instance, reinforced the broad appeal of left internationalism among radical students in African universities. As Andrew Ivaska

[389] Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 19.

documents for Tanzania, university students, knowledgeable about Cold War events and African liberation struggles, were key players in this development.[390] The appeal of the left among sections of African students and youth rested on the radical alternative it provided to deteriorating local socio-economic conditions as well as international changes in the late 60s and 70s.[391]As Abdullah Ibrahim says of Sierra Leone in the 1970s, a linkage, fuelled by leftist and anti-establishment ideas, was established between students and lumpen youth, which transcended the confines of schools into the street-side joints of relaxation for unemployed youth on the margins of urban Sierra Leone, known as *potes*. Abdullah observes that "*pote* discourse was spiced with generous quotes from Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley, Kwame Nkrumah, Wallace-Johnson, and at times Haile Selassie. Some of these *pote* types had read Kwame Nkrumah and Frantz Fanon, a bit of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, and some undigested Marx and Lenin."[392]Similarly, the ideational founts in the 1970s campus Marxism, as Paul Nugent calls it, in Ghanaian universities were the works of Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, Paul Baran and André Gunder Frank among others. Attracted by the seeming coherence of the explanations of these dependency and underdevelopment theorists for the declining fortunes of recently independent countries, students and like-minded

[390] Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 126.

[391] See, for instance, Abdoulaye Bathily, Mamadou Diouf and Mohammed Mbodj, "The Senegalese Student Movement from its Inception to 1989," in *African Studies in Social Movement and Democracy*, eds. Mahmood Mamdani and Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1995), 392-401; Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction," 203-35, and Rashid, "Student Radicals, Lumpen Youth, and the Origins of Revolutionary Groups in Sierra Leone," 66-89.

[392] Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction," 209.

professors espoused, debated and purveyed these radical ideas in the leftist study and discussion cells on campus.[393]

The experiences of three students at the University of Ghana, from the early to late 1970s, illustrate the turn to the left in student political circles. Kwasi Gyan-Appenteng, a student at the University of Ghana, Legon, between 1972 and 1975, relates that there was a general search among many students on campus for alternative or counter ideas to prevailing explanations for the state of the developing world and that underscored the "broad acceptance of Marxist approaches to analysis of society and political economy." Gyan-Appenteng went to Legon after his schooling at Okuapemman Secondary School in the Eastern Region of the country. He recalls that he developed an interest in African and international affairs in the secondary school from his teachers, some of whom were American Peace Corps volunteers. A stint in the US as an exchange student in the late 1960s where he experienced the Civil Rights Movement and the activities of the Black Panthers encouraged his interest in politics, consolidated his broad internationalist outlook and spurred critical reflection, which he brought to the search of the campus left for alternatives in the 1970s and to student activism. Gyan-Appenteng became an active student leader at Legon and also at the continental level as an executive of the All Africa Students Union (AASU).[394] Nyeya Yen, a late 1970s Legon student, had been introduced to progressive and internationalist ideas in his early secondary school education at the Tamale Business School where he was actively involved in the activities of the Ghana United Nations Students Association (GUNSA). GUNSA organized debates and current

[393] Nugent, *Big Men, Small Boys*, 32.
[394] Asiedu-Acquah Field Notes (AAFN): Interview with Kwasi Gyan Appenteng, September 2010.

affairs programs. He got drawn to socialist ideas at Navrongo Secondary School where he continued his secondary education and by the time he arrived at Legon, he was a budding socialist. His membership of a Marxist study group on campus was an opportunity to hone his half-baked socialist ideas. He moved in student circles that involved radical students such as Takyiwaa Manuh, Ato Austen, Akoto Ampaw, Mohammed Chambas, and Zaya Yeebo among others.[395] Barring differences in specific details, a similar trajectory was the experience of another student, John Dramani Mahama, currently the president of Ghana, in the late 1970s. Mahama went to Ghana National Secondary School in the northern metropolis of Tamale. Arriving from the north of the country as a freshman on the campus of the University of Ghana in late 1978, a few months after the rigged referendum on UNIGOV, Mahama found close intellectual community in campus socialist discussion cells. University campuses were as politically exciting as ever as the NUGS and the various university SRCs led students to continue their opposition to the Supreme Military Council. Mahama's attraction to campus Marxism and political activism had been ignited by his secondary school literature teacher, a Mr. Wentum, who studied at the University of Cape Coast in the mid 1970s and had moved in similar leftist and student-activist circles that John Mahama joined in the late 1970s. Teacher Wentum, called affectionately by his students as 'Brother Wentum', introduced Mahama to professors at the University of Ghana who ran campus leftist cells and study groups. Mahama owed his growing political consciousness and involvement in politics to moving in such ideological and intellectual circles. "I was…excited about the theories I was

[395] Nyeya Yen, "I am nobody's small boy," Centre for Conscientist Studies and Analyses Network, 6 May 2014, https://consciencism.wordpress.com/organise/yen-nyeya-i-am-nobodys-small-boy/. (Accessed 27 November 2014). Also published on *Modern Ghana News*, 6 May 2014, http://www.modernghana.com/news/539424/1/i-am-nobodys-small-boy.html.

formulating and debating with my socialist comrades, the relationships and leadership abilities I was developing," he recalls.[396] The turn to the left among university students guaranteed the presence of radical politics in student culture, which shaped the student movement in its involvement in national politics.

The campus left was not a monolith neither did it have an unchecked rein in the universities. As Nyeya Yen observes, "there were varying degrees of revolutionary activities and debates of the way forward. There were heightened discussions and disagreements among the left as to the way forward." These differences among the student left, Yen believes, were also conditioned by their class backgrounds. As he puts it: "those of us from peasant and working class background tended to be forceful and wanted the revolution now, while those from middle class backgrounds were more cautious."[397] Against this eclectic leftism were students who espoused more liberal democratic ideas. Gyan-Appenteng recalls many debates with students who were "on the right."[398] The traditional academic departments of the universities also remained largely conservative and impervious to the leftist ideas that circulated in certain circles on the campus. Scholars such as University of Ghana historian Adu Boahen, who was also influential in the Ghanaian academe and public, constituted a bulwark against campus Marxism. As head of Legon's History Department between 1967 and 1975 and head of graduate studies for a part of that period, Boahen used his prominence to counter

[396] Mahama, *My First Coup d'état*, 180-208.

[397] Yen, "I am nobody's small boy."

[398] Interview with Gyan-Appenteng.

whatever influence academic Marxism could have.[399] The now legendary public debates between Walter Rodney and Ali Mazrui also reverberated beyond its East African setting to inform ideological contentions on Ghanaian campuses. The leftist influence on student activism was therefore one of a general radicalization and a desire to craft an independent voice for the student movement in national politics. The contentions between the left and the right within and without the universities thus made for an intellectual ferment of ideas and debate that animated student culture.[400]

Students' critical approach to university authorities and the elitism, including their own, prevalent on the campuses was often the model for the way they approached national politics. The social politics of the campus was therefore directly relevant for student participation in national politics. The student-ran periodicals during the period were full of articles, opinions pieces and letters that criticized university administration at all levels. In one such open letter, penned shortly after the overthrow of the Nkrumah government in 1966, a student, named Boakye Djang, lambasted the authorities of the University of Ghana for making too much of "lax discipline" among students. Opining that the authorities' complaint about student indiscipline was "plain nonsensical claptrap", Djang reminded them that it was the same "fawning obedience" for rules and regulations, which made possible the authoritarianism of the Nkrumah government.[401]

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[399] Ivor Agyeman-Duah, "The historian who made history himself," *The New African*, 453 (July 2006): 58-60.

[400] Interview with Gyan Appenteng, and also see Nugent, *Big Men, Small Boys*.

[401] Boakye Djang, "Our University and the problem of discipline – An open letter to the 'authorities'," *Legonite*, Lent 1966. I could not establish conclusively that the author of this letter is the same as the army Captain Boakye Djan who led a group of young officers and subordinate ranks of the Ghana Armed Forces in the successful revolt of June 4th, 1979. Circumstantial evidence, however, would suggest that it is the

Sometimes, the students' approach was more dramatic. Ekow Spio Garbrah, a student at Legon in the early 1970s, JCR executive of the all-male Commonwealth Hall, and editor of its magazine, the *Echo*, recalls one such dramatic moment involving the students of his residential hall, informally known as Vandal City:

> [A] key expression of Vandalism [the guiding philosophy of the students of Commonwealth Hall] was founded on a defiant attitude to unfair and unjust decisions by the Hall or University authorities, and even of national governments. It was in this vein that Vandal City became the first Hall on the University of Ghana campus to rebel in 1972 against the "academic pomposity" (acapompo) then prevailing on University campuses. A good example of this alien tradition was the requirement whereby all students (Junior Members) had to wear shirts and ties and university gowns and parade for dinner each Wednesday night, while their lecturers and professors (Senior Members) sat on a feudal High Table and imbibed precious and expensive imported wines drawn from a basement cellar full of such wines. Colourfully-clad waiters in waist coats went about serving both senior and junior members, in complete servitude, such 3-course meals as "chicken cassahe" (chicken casserole). In a fit of insubordination one fine evening in 1972, Vandals overthrew this feudal system by breaking into the wine cellar and spiriting away the liquid vestiges of the prevailing class system. The Senior Members were not amused, and a long and icy confrontation took place…. There were attempts to rusticate or dismiss some students. As Secretary to the JCR at the time, I was in the midst of the crisis.[402]

Though an incipient elite, Ghanaian university students delighted in sticking it to the 'big man'. As youth, their social and politically subordinate status fed that attitude and it encouraged and informed their involvement in national politics. The politics of students

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same person. The soldier studied for his bachelor's degree in English between 1964-67 at the University of Ghana. He developed an interest in journalism during this period, was an editor of the *Legonite* in 1967, and practiced briefly as a journalist after graduation in 1967 before enlisting in the army in 1970.

[402] Ekwow Spio Garbrah, "Vandalism: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *The Ghanaian Observer*, 28 May 2010, http://www.ghanaianobserver.net/content/vandalism-yesterday-today-tomorrow. (Accessed on 19 August 2010).

was thus founded on a long-standing historical construction of youth politics built around the right to question or rebel against authority, remove unwanted leaders from power, and check the abuses of those in power. [403] The exercise of these rights also anchored them as social actors who acted on behalf of the common man and woman. Under the banner of the National Union of Ghana Students, Ghanaian universities students would anchor student activism as a fulcrum in national politics of the late 1960s and 1970s.

The NUGS, the turn to the left, and radicalization of the student movement

The NUGS established itself as the leading organization in the student movement. It drew its support and membership, like in the earlier period, from the network of Student Representative Councils (SRCs) and Junior Common Rooms of the various universities. It would later bring into its fold students of the other higher education institutions such as the polytechnics and the Ghana Institute of Journalism. Beyond this critical core, the NUGS developed affiliations and alliances with local and international student and youth groups. The NUGS' local and international affiliations in the 1970s reflected the turn to left internationalism and the radicalization of the student movement. Some of the local groups with which it had an alliance in the 1970s included the Pan-African Youth Movement (PYM) and the Socialist Revolutionary Youth League of Ghana.[404] It was also affiliated to the All Africa Students Union (AASU) and the Prague-based International Union of Students (IUS). The AASU was established in 1972 at an international conference at the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. It drew participants

[403] See Maxwell Owusu, "Customs and Coups", 70-71. Maxwell Owusu, "Rebellion, Revolution and Tradition", 375.

[404] Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 18.

from Tanzania, Nigeria, the Gambia, Malawi, Cameroun, Zimbabwe and the host nation of Ghana. At the inaugural conference, the AASU announced itself as a "revolutionary, radical and militant student organization" working closely with the Organization of African Unity. Its communiqué contained resolutions that condemned the colonial regimes in Portuguese and southern Africa, and called for the closing of ranks among African peoples and nations against "imperialist and neo-colonialist forces [that] would wish to recolonize Africa."[405] AASU's impact on the NUGS and the Ghanaian student movement at large was not only in ideas but also in personnel: many of the NUGS leaders worked in the leadership of AASU and vice-versa. The relationship between the NUGS and the IUS had a similar significance and consequence. Viewed as a communist dominated body since its early years in the immediate post-World War II period, the IUS by the late 1960s concentrated on forming relationships with student organizations in non-aligned countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia.[406] Two Ghanaian student organizations, the National Students Organization (NSO) in the United Kingdom and the Central Union of Ghana Students in Europe (based in West Germany) joined the IUS in the 1970s, and that became the basis for the home-based National Union of Ghana Students to join the IUS in 1976. The relationship was of intellectual/ideational and practical import for the activism of the NUGS.[407]

[405] "African Students Get Militant," *The New Ghana* 1, no. 25 (1975).

[406] Philip Altbach, "The International Students Movement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no.1 (1970), 171-172.

[407] Kwasi Gyan-Appenteng, "Comrade Akrofi – Gone but not forgotten," *Daily Graphic*, 27 June 2014 (Accessed online on 29 June 2014).

Certain NUGS-initiated events in the mid-1970s would consolidate the turn to left internationalism. In January 1976, for instance, the NUGS, under the leadership of Hayford Patterson Akrofi, organized the "International Students' Seminar on Neo-colonialist Penetration into African Universities and other Institutions of Higher Learning," which condemned western Cold War intrigues in Africa and voiced support for leftist anti-colonial forces such as the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).[408] At the time the MPLA was engaged in a bitter civil war with the combined forces of the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which had the support of the United States and apartheid South Africa. The anti-western sentiments at the conference were a source of considerable concern to western diplomatic observers, especially the US Embassy in Accra. It was also at the conference that the foreign Ghanaian student organizations, the National Students Organization of the UK and the Central Union of Ghana Students in Europe, officially joined the NUGS paving the way for the formalization of the NUGS relationship with the IUS. Under the pressure of the NUGS from this conference, the government of Ghana officially recognized the leftist MPLA in the Angolan civil war. The student movement was equally instrumental in getting the Ghanaian government to cancel a scheduled visit to the country by US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in April 1976. Kissinger was on an African tour to drum up support for American foreign policy on the continent and the NUGS' found it objectionable that

[408] "Tribute to our late former NUGS President Hayford Patterson Akrofi," *Official Blog of the National Union of Ghana Students* (NUGS), 28 June 2014, http://nugstoday.blogspot.com/2014/06/national-union-of-ghana-students-nugs.html (Accessed 16 March, 2015).

Ghana was on the list of countries Kissinger was to visit.[409] The radical left elements in the NUGS were largely responsible for this position and their visibility and nudging of the student's movement to oppose US Cold War policies in Africa was misread by US diplomatic sources in Accra as being Soviet-inspired. The conference was on the sole initiative of the NUGS, then under the leadership of its leftist president.[410]

Explo Nani-Kofi, who would become a NUGS executive in the early 1980s and one of its leading leftist activists, has argued that the NUGS' officially adopted scientific socialism as its guiding philosophy in 1976.[411] The NUGS did not officially become a socialist organization and not all the student leaders were leftists. The turn to the left within NUGS tapped into a general student anti-establishment activism dating back to the Nkrumah period. In the political and economic failures of the 1970s, the anti-establishment sentiments among students surged to the fore. Many were drawn to critiques of the post-colonial state without being necessarily leftist. All of that was part of the search for alternatives that pervaded higher education in Africa in what has been termed the lost decade of Africa.[412]

[409] Gyan-Appenteng, "Comrade Akrofi – Gone but not forgotten."

[410] "Tribute to our late former NUGS President Hayford Patterson Akrofi."

[411] Explo Nani-Kofi, "The dynamics of political struggle in Ghana, Part 1," *Pambazuka News*, 592, 5 July 2012, http://www.pambazuka.net/en/category.php/features/83360. (Accessed online 20 March 2015).

[412] See Spio-Garbrah, "Vandalism"; Interview with Gyan-Appenteng; and, Mahama, *My First Coup d'état.*

Aluta: Student and youth activism in national politics, c.1966-1979

The scholarly short-shrift given to the national activism of students in the late 1960s and early 1970s, that is, the immediate years after the overthrow of the Nkrumah government is perhaps because of the relatively short duration of the National Liberation Council (NLC), the military regime that deposed the Nkrumah government, and the civilian government of Prime Minister Kofi Abrefa Busia, which was abruptly ended by another coup in 1972. None of these administrations appear to have had the level of antagonism that characterized relations between students and the Nkrumah government to have merited academic attention. However, the ruminations of Togbe Yao, the *Sunday Mirror* columnist, in 1968 over the 'gospel of youth' in relation to national governance clearly indicated that the generation-inflected politics from the Nkrumah period were not over.[413] The mobilizational efforts of these two administrations also implicated students and youth in important ways in national politics. If the mid to late 1970s is to be seen as period of potential revolutionary change,[414] its long-term development from the late 1960s must be examined. In its ebb and flow, the Ghanaian state from this period started failing to be a guarantor of national development and collective benefits to all. Those at the top of the social pile increasingly became corrupt and were seen as such by the mass of society but the leaders also failed to meet their side of the social bargain; a dereliction of Maxwell Owusu's "jural postulates" that required of them to seek the welfare and wellbeing of those at the bottom of the pile, and thus helping to create the crisis of the

[413] See, for instance, Kofi Busia "The Role of a University Student in Politics," speech given at the launch of the University of Ghana branch of the Progress Party, June 20th, 1969, in *Ghana's Struggle For Democracy and Freedom: Speeches 1957-1969 by Dr. Kofi Abrefa Busia*, comp. H. K. Akyeampong, (Accra: Danquah Memorial Publishing Company, [1978?]), 153-163.

[414] See Nugent, *Big Men Small Boys*, 15-19.

1970s.[415] Student and youth politics helped to create the potential for a radical resolution of the crisis. University campuses were sites for the circulation of ideas and theorizing about the situation. The student movement matured and learned the usefulness of building coalitions with other segments of Ghanaian society to fight various political causes.

As the new elders of state, the NLC had to negotiate its own relationship with youth. While dismantling the youth-related institutions of the Nkrumah era such as the Young Pioneers, the Workers Brigade and the Nkrumah Ideological Institute,[416] the NLC nevertheless reinstituted and refurbished the state's interest in youth. Despite pronounced symbolic shifts from the Nkrumah era, the NLC's approach to youth reflected the patriotic and developmentalist agenda that was characteristic of the Nkrumah initiatives. The military regime created the Ghana National Youth Council in early 1967, which drew on youth and voluntary organizations spread throughout the country. The launch of the new Youth Council on the premises of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Accra symbolically signaled a return to more conventional youth institutions and organization. Lt. General Emmanuel K. Kotoka, head of state and the NLC member responsible for Defence, Health, and Social Welfare, performed the inauguration of the new council, which, in the report of the *Ghanaian Times*, aimed at "directing the

[415] See Chazan, *An Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics*; Maxwell Owusu, "Custom and Coups"; and, Nugent, *Big Men, Small Boys*.

[416] "Ideological Institute closed down," *Daily Graphic*, 28 February 1966 and "Pioneer Banned," *Daily Graphic*, 8 March 1966.

reactions of the youth towards the spirit of group bel[o]ngingness."[417] The NLC enjoyed the general support of students largely because of its commitment to returning the country to civilian democratic rule in a specified time. Given the experience of the Nkrumah period, student politics had come to be constructed as supportive of democratization and its activists saw themselves as such.

In support of the return to democratic rule, the student's movement extended a lot of goodwill to the new civilian government of the Progress Party (PP), led by Professor Kofi Abrefa Busia, following the elections of 1969. Busia had the added advantage of a distinguished academic career at the University of Ghana where he enjoyed a considerable following among students and faculty, especially in the immediate period after the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah, his political arch-nemesis.[418] Busia was also deeply involved in the NLC's review of higher education in 1966-67.[419] The PP's mobilization of students and youth, while rhetorically contrasted against that of the CPP government of the early independence period, was uncannily similar in many ways. In the run up to the 1969 elections, the PP set up party branches in the country's institutions of higher learning. Busia's message to the university students during the inauguration of the campus branches was reminiscent of the developmentalism of the Nkrumah years[420]

[417] "Youth Council Formed," *Ghanaian Times*, 3 April 1967.

[418] See, for instance, Alexander Kwapong, "Busia – A Great Ghanaian," Speech by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana at the award of an honorary doctorate degree to Prime Minster Kofi Abrefa Busia on 14 March 1970, appendix in *Ghana's Struggle For Democracy and Freedom*, 298-300.

[419] *Report of the Education Review Committee* (Accra: Government of Ghana, 1967), 91.

[420] Busia "The Role of a University Student in Politics," speech given at the launch of the University of Ghana branch of the Progress Party, June 20th, 1969, in *Ghana's Struggle For Democracy and Freedom*, 153-163.

and was in line with many post-colonial African governments' continued interest in coopting youth to state projects.[421] In line with this developmentalist agenda for students and youth, the PP government piloted a National Service Corps program, which was to among other things, "encourage the spirit of national service among the youth of Ghana" and mobilize them to provide build social amenities, provide essential services, and help to tackle diseases, illiteracy, hunger and unemployment. The Service Corp members were also to receive practical skills training. The similarities between the National Service Corps and the Nkrumah-era Workers Brigade were not lost on the Busia government. Prime Minister Busia acknowledged as much when, in launching the National Service Corps in December 1969, he suggested that there would be cooperation between the new national youth organization and the rump of the Worker's Brigade as well as other youth organizations such as the Voluntary Workcamp Association of the Ghana (VWAG or Volu) and the National Union of Ghana Students. The National Youth Council, set up early under the NLC, was to continue functioning as one of the coordinating agencies for the National Service. It had the task of organizing work camps for students and youth across the country.[422]

The PP government, however, would soon court dissent with students being in the forefront of opposition. Insisting on greater transparency in government, students under the leadership of the National Union of Students, pushed for government members and

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[421] See Diouf, "African Youth and Public Space', 3. Also see Chapter 3.

[422] Busia, "The National Service Corps", national radio and television broadcast to launch the National Service Corps on 15th December, 1969, in *Ghana's Struggle For Democracy and Freedom*, 291-296. Also see Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 104-105.

the parliamentarians to declare their assets as required by the national constitution. The NUGS issued an ultimatum at its conference early in 1971 for government to enforce the constitutional provision on the declaration of Assets. The response of the PP dominated parliament was to invite the student leaders and chastise them for "their concern with national affairs."[423] The elderly condescension, reminiscent of patriarchal responses to the politics of youth in early periods of Ghana's history would become characteristic of the PP governments interactions with students and that in turn would make student opposition more spirited. The incidents over the declaration of assets, as Naomi Chazan notes, would make the students agents in "pioneering dissident opinion and action against the Busia government". Chazan perceptively also draws attention to the two sources that underscored the student opposition to the Busia government: the generation of Nkrumah's Young Pioneers coming into their own as some of the student leaders and the experience of student activism and politics under Nkrumah, which had come to brook no governmental intimidation and paternalism.[424] That would explain the NUGS call in April 1971 on the Busia government to allow Nkrumah to return to the country in a communiqué that also gave the government an ultimatum to have government officials declare their assets. The students warned that in default government officials "should be prepared to face any consequences." The students encouraged government officials and the parliamentarians to set "a good example in discipline by respecting the contents of the Constitution…in order not to forfeit the right to be pace setters in public probity and the

[423] Republic of Ghana, Public Relations Department, "The Fall of the Second Republic: First Hundred Days of the National Redemption Council," (Accra: Ghana publishing Corporation, 1972), 13, cited in Chazan, *Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics*, 232.

[424] Chazan, *Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics*, 225.

realization of the noble end of national progress."[425] The language of the students must have elicited the paternalism of the government but it left no doubt as to how the NUGS-led student movement saw itself: as a guarantor of the constitution and national interests.

The much larger context of the student opposition to the PP government was the deteriorating economic conditions caused by the economic liberalization policies and initiatives of the Party government. Following deals with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for budgetary support and economic recovery, the PP government cut public expenditure, retrenched some public sectors workers and devalued the national currency, the *Cedi*. Some of these policies were a continuation from the NLC, which had come to agreements with the Bretton Woods institutions in a post-Nkrumah pivot back to the West. Busia undermined the democratic credentials of his government when he attacked the judiciary for questioning his dismissal of 568 public servants. One of the dismissed government workers, E. K. Sallah, of the parastatal Ghana National Trading Corporation (GNTC) challenged his dismissal in court and won.[426] The retrenchment of public sector workers, the adverse effects of the cedi devaluation and the general economic liberalization policies of the government provoked a strong opposition from the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and its affiliates with the full support of the National Union of Ghana Students. The government's antagonism towards student criticisms of its policies animated student activism and encouraged an alliance between organized workers and the students. The government further alienated students when it

[425] "Students Want Nkrumah Back?," *Daily Graphic*, 7 April 1971.

[426] D. A. Okine, "Sallah's action against govt is proper – Court," *Daily Graphic*, 17 March 1970; Chazan, *Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics*, 224-231.

cut the national education budget, replaced the free education policy of the Nkrumah era with a loan scheme for university students, and attempted a fee-paying scheme for secondary school education.[427] The antipathy towards the government was dramatized in regular student protests and worker strikes.[428] The TUC and the NUGS formed a Consultative Committee in late 1971 to coordinate the actions of organized labor and the students in their dealings with the government.[429] The experience of building alliances with other social groups in political action would come in handy for the student movement in the latter 1970s.

The government sought to control the situation by outlawing the TUC while it attacked the students.[430] Prime Minister Busia's public condescension towards students' criticisms and protests against his government's policies only worsened the situation. In one such outburst, the prime minister said that he viewed the protests and demonstrations of the students as acts of children:

> I think they are children who have not attained maturity. If students who are being trained now think that they are wiser and more intelligent than those who have already graduated from those higher institutions, then they are making a mistake.[431]

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[427] Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 14.

[428] "Government won't beg strikers – Busia," *Daily Graphic*, 19 June 1970 and G. Kwesi Annoh, "No Cause for Alarm," *Daily Graphic*, 11 October 1971.

[429] Amoa, *University Students' Political Action*, ix.

[430] Eben Quarcoo, "TUC Out!...New Bill now passed," *Daily Graphic*, 10 September 1971 and Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 14.

[431] Asirifi Danquah, "Busia looks down on student riots," *Daily Graphic*, 14 April 1971.

The paternalism of the prime minister was unmistakable but it was also indicative of the impact of student activism in a climate of general disenchantment about the government's economic policies. Fully aware of the widespread disenchantment towards its policies, including rumours of a potential coup détat, [432] the government was extra sensitive to the vocal opposition of the students. Busia's language was also reminiscent of the generation-inflected epithet of "verandah boys" used by elite colonial Ghanaian politicians against the youths who supported the CPP to victory in the struggle for national independence in the 1940s and 1950s.[433] The prime minister's attitude invoked the traditional chiefly and elderly politics of Ghana, which viewed the critiques of the younger generation with condescension and suspicion.[434] This won't be the last time that Ghanaian political and professional elite would derisively refer to the activism of students as the actions of "small boys" who ought to listen to their social elders in the 1970s and beyond.[435]

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[432] See Asirifi Danquah, "Prime Minister on Coup D'état," *Daily Graphic*, 7 June 1971; G. Kwesi Annoh, "No Cause for Alarm," *Daily Graphic*, 11 October 1971; G. Kwesi Annoh, "Cedi Rate Goes Up," *Daily Graphic*, 10 November, 1971; Nii Bortey Tagoe, "Agama on the cedi devaluation," *Daily Graphic*, 1 January 1972; "P.M. WARNS OF HARD TIMES AHEAD, *Daily Graphic*, 1 January 1972; and, George Naykene, "Lubricants prices up," *Daily Graphic*, 1 January 1972.

[433] See Austin, *Politics in Ghana*; Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*; and, Rooney, *Vision and Tragedy*.

[434] The views of Busia, a distinguished sociologist, on the student agitations against his government were also reminiscent of generational conflict theories prevalent in both academic and popular sociology in the late 1960s and 70s which saw student activism in negative terms and rendered it as the result of mostly irrational and emotional outbursts. See, for instance, Lewis S. Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (London: Heinemann, 1969). For a discussion of generational conflict theory in relation to student activism in Ghana of the late 60s and early 70s see Amoa, *University Students' Political Action*, 5-9.

[435] See Yen, "I am nobody's small boy."

The general neo-liberal tenor of the Busia government's economic policies fed the nostalgia in student circles for Nkrumah.[436] Gyan-Appenteng notes that there was a re-evaluation of the Nkrumah government among radical elements in the student movement who found Nkrumah's nationalism and pan-Africanism sorely lacking in the Busia government.[437] Students' opposition to the neo-liberalism of the Busia government and the nostalgia for Nkrumah was also not unrelated to the turn to left internationalism within the student movement. The increasing popularity of underdevelopment and dependency theories on the campuses of the universities encouraged radical student elements to find suspect the neoliberalism of the Busia government and to look fondly back on Nkrumahist analysis of neocolonialism. The failure of the economic liberalization policies to achieve tangible results only served to rally the opposition.

It was hardly surprising then when students and organized labour welcomed the military coup of January 1972 that removed the Busia government from power. Rumours of coups against the PP government had done the rounds in the country even before one occurred in early 1972.[438] Playing up the failures of the neoliberal policies of the deposed government, the new military regime, the National Redemption Council (NRC), under the leadership of Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, was able to keep the support of a large segment of the Ghanaian population, including the student movement, for a while. The nationalistic tone of the NRC and its initial repudiation of some of the policies of the

[436] "Students Want Nkrumah Back?," *Daily Graphic*, 7 April 1971.

[437] Interview with Kwasi Gyan Appenteng, September 2010.

[438] Asirifi Danquah, "Prime Minister on Coup D'état," *Daily Graphic*, 7 June 1971.

previous government struck a cord with the students. The regime revalued the cedi, lifted the ban on the Trades Union Congress, repudiated Ghana's debts to the Bretton Woods institutions and sought to rein in foreign companies in the country. The government nationalized some foreign businesses. Its policy of promoting agricultural and industrial self-sufficiency, dubbed Operation Feed Yourself (OFY) and Operation Feed Your Industries (OFYI), also carried popular support for a while and chalked some successes.[439] Ekow Spio Garbrah, who was a student at Legon and editor of Commonwealth Hall's *Echo* in 1972-73, captures the sense of the students' initial identification with and support for the NRC regime:

> Acheampong…initiated a series of nationalistic programmes that were appealing to young idealistic and patriotic students. They included the "Kafo Didi" (a debtor must eat) policy, Operation Feed Yourself, and other measures that were deemed by the student movement as being in Ghana's national interest. It was during this period of patriotic fervent that Commonwealth Hall students led the university students to initiate various "Yentua" (we shall not pay) demonstrations around the country to support the government in its tough stance against some international creditors who had conspired with the Progress Party government…to pile Ghana high full of debts.[440]

Students helped in harvesting crops on state farms to feed state industries.[441] They gave whole-hearted support to the idea of a mandatory one-year national service to be undertaken by all university students immediately upon graduation. Students demonstrated across the country in support of the service scheme, and thus encouraged

[439] Cameron Duodu, "We Won't Pay Dubious Debts," *New Ghana*, 1, 20 (1972), 2; Boahen, *The Ghanaian Sphinx*, 8-9. Also see Donald Rothschild, "Military Regime Performance: An Appraisal of the Ghana Experience, 1972-1978," *Comparative Politics* 12, no. 4 (July 1980): 459-479.

[440] Spio-Garbrah, "Vandalism."

[441] "Reviving the economy: STUDENTS HARVEST SUGARCANE" *Daily Graphic*, 14 February 1972; Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 15.

the government to implement it in 1973. Spio-Garbrah, who was among the first batch of national service personnel, observes that they saw the obligation as a "contribution to national development."[442] It was also an expression of students' interest in a more participatory form of national governance.

The enthusiasm for the NRC, however, started to wane when the economy took a turn for the worse from the mid-1970s and the regime clamped on criticisms. That marked the beginnings of a turn-around in government and student relations and was the basis for widespread demands for the military regime to give way to a civilian government. The IMF withheld support to the regime because of the regime's refusal to pay Ghana's external debts and unwillingness to devalue the cedi. The global oil crisis of 1973-74 made a further dent in the economy and encouraged a galloping inflation that was one of the highest by the end of 1974. These were compounded by creeping corruption in government, and a sense of unchecked indiscipline in the military. The worsening economy of the country and government corruption generated critics among both civilians and the lower ranks of the Ghanaian military, and the regime responded by clamping down on criticisms of its rule. Students of the three universities in Accra, Kumasi and Cape Coast demonstrated against the regime when it appeared unwilling to deal with soldiers who maltreated a student in the coastal town of Ho in 1974. Following the demonstrations, the NRC closed down all the universities and dictated that the students were to be re-admitted after they had undertaken to be of good behavior. The government statement announcing the closure of the universities claimed that it was

[442] Spio-Garbrah, "Vandalism." Also see "NATIONAL SERVICE: Graduates to get ⊄100 a month," *Daily Graphic*, 18 August 1973.

"willing to cooperate fully with the students and has supported their legitimate aspirations" but it warned that it would not "tolerate acts of lawlessness and vandalism which are not in tune with the revolutionary spirit of building [a] new Ghana."[443] The demonstrations and the government response reflected wider tensions over the management of the country and the poor performance of the economy.

The NRC reorganized itself into the Supreme Military Council in 1975, a move that integrated the top brass of the military more into government positions and into the management of state corporations and parastatals, but it provoked its critics, led by the student movement, to demand that the regime step down from government. In reorganizing itself, the junta also coopted some conservative civilian political elite, some of the leadership of organized labor and segments of the business community to serve in government or and on state boards. Corruption in government circles and the top echelons of the military worsened. The NUGS, and other youth groups such as the Pan-African Youth Movement (PANYMO) and the Socialist Revolutionary Youth League of Ghana, as well as professional groups such as the University Teachers Association (UTA), the Ghana Bar Association (GBA) and the Association of Recognized Professional Bodies (ARPB), started advocating for the regime to return the country to civilian democratic rule. The closing of all avenues for democratic forces to participate in national governance further encouraged these groups in their demands.

[443] "All varsities closed down," *Daily Graphic*, 12 February 1974. Also see Asamoah, *The Experience of a Non-Conformist*, 235-236.

In response to the growing demand for a return to democratic rule, the SMC in October 1976 floated the idea of a Union Government (UNIGOV), a ruling coalition of the military, the police and select civilian elite, which would not be based on political parties. This form of government, the regime argued, was a better option than multiparty competitive politics, which bred social and political divisiveness.[444] The government set up the Union Government Committee to canvass views on the idea and make recommendations to the SMC. Though UNIGOV aimed at the political survival of the regime, its central element of non-party politics tapped into genuine anxieties about the divisiveness and tensions associated with competitive partisan politics. Many chiefs, for instance, appeared to have been sold on the need to avoid the divisiveness of multi-partyism.[445] The SMC established or sponsored a phalanx of groups to pitch the idea of UNIGOV around the country. These groups included the Friends, the Organizers Council, the Ghana Peace and Solidarity Council, and the Ghana Patriotic Movement. The regime sought to break the opposition of the students and youth to UNIGOV, by forming its own youth groups, which included the African Youth Command and the Ghana Youngsters Club. In March 1978, the regime organized a national referendum on UNIGOV and declared that the majority of voters supported the idea despite the widespread opposition expressed across the country. The declared results of the referendum, widely believed to have been rigged, indicated the regime's interest in holding on to power at all cost, which in turn coalesced opposition to the idea of

[444] For an extended discussion and analysis of UNIGOV see Maxwell Owusu, "Politics without Parties: Reflections on the Union Government Proposals in Ghana," *African Studies Review* 22, no.1 (April 1979): 89-108, and Chazan, *An Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics*, 244-267.

[445] See "No Politics…says Okyeman," *Daily Graphic*, 29 November 1976 and "Union Government Okay – Chief," *Daily Graphic*, 29 November 1976, and Asamoah, *The Experience of a Non-Conformist*, 236-237.

UNIGOV and the regime.[446] It was the continued opposition, which led to the re-organization of the SMC with General Frederick William Kwasi Akuffo taking over from General Acheampong as the head of the SMC regime in July 1978. The change in leadership, while welcomed by some, did not see a let up in student demands for a return to democratic rule. The SMC, under General Akuffo, would give up the UNIGOV idea and promised to hand over power to an elected civilian government by July 1979.

While scholars have noted the alliances built among the student movement and professionals in opposition to the idea of UNIGOV and the authoritarianism of the Supreme Military Council in the late 1970s, there is hardly any acknowledgement of student activism as the defining factor.[447] The literature represents student activism as secondary to the political action of the professional associations, especially the nation-wide strikes organized by the Association of Recognized Professional Bodies (ARPB) in July 1977.[448] Yet long before the professionals started rallying against the regime, students had been pushing for reforms and were the catalysts of civil society opposition to the regime, even predating the critical years of 1977-1979. It was largely in response to the demands and pressures of the NUGS-led student and youth movement for a return to constitutional democratic rule that the SMC promoted the idea of UNIGOV. Student opposition to UNIGOV began in late 1976 when the government announced the concept.

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[446] Boahen, *The Ghanaian Sphinx*, 15-17, and Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 18-20. Boahen contends that three separate results were declared for the referendum; two of them declared a majority in favour of UNIGOV and one a majority against UNIGOV. All three, according to Boahen, were of dubious validity.

[447] See Boahen, *The Ghanaian Sphinx*, and Nugent, *Big men Small boys.*

[448] Boahen, *The Ghanaian Sphinx*, 17.

By early 1977, student activism against UNIGOV and the general performance of the regime had reached such a height and was catalyzing opposition in the civil society to such an extent that the student movement became the primary target of government repression. Government officials and pro-regime media insinuated that the student movement had been infiltrated by anti-regime politician and academics, and warned students against the misuse of their power. In an address to a youth rally as part of a National Youth Week in early February 1977, SMC Commissioner, E. K. Buckman, warned Ghanaian youth to do away with "all negative factors such as the irresponsible use of student power." The entire speech dripped with the rhetoric of patriotism, civic responsibility, nationalism, development, and the need for the country's youth to rally behind the regime to build a united Ghana.[449] The National Youth Week organized by the National Youth Council aimed rhetorically at the student movement's agitations against the SMC. The pro-regime newspaper, *The Echo* (not the student magazine), also in early 1977 drew similarities between the student movement's opposition to the SMC and the global youth protests of the late 1960s, which the paper claimed only aimed at undermining governments and the "mass destruction of civilized agencies". The heyday of "students' power" in the late 1960s, according to the paper, was long gone. Harping on the government's claim that anti-regime politicians and academics instigated students' political action against the SMC, the paper editorialized that:

> …students' power PER SE is today a spent force. It did not change things elsewhere; it is not likely that it has glorious chances of success here… Let sweet reasonableness, therefore, prevail at student conferences.[450]

[449] E. K. Buckman, "Youth," full text of speech at National Youth Rally, in the *Echo*, 13 February 1977.

[450] "Students' Power," editorial, *The Echo*, 6 February 1977.

The reference to "student conferences" alluded to meetings and publicly announced resolutions and communiqués of the National Union of Ghana Students since late 1976, which criticized the UNIGOV concept and called on government to return the country to civilian rule. The regime and its supporters recognized the centrality and impact of student opposition to their designs even as it used the media and speeches by leading regime officials to encourage support for UNIGOV around the country.

In May 1977, before the nation-wide strike of the professionals in July, the NUGS staged and coordinated demonstrations against UNIGOV and SMC in all the three universities. The government's decision to close down the universities in response to the student demonstrations was rather a boon to student activism and opposition. The NUGS mobilized students, now off-campus, to travel around the country and work with other youth organizations to whip up opposition to UNIGOV. As John Mahama remembers:

> When the students went home to await the re-opening of their universities, they carried pamphlets written and published by the National Union of Ghana Students detailing the reasons why UNiGov should not be approved, the most important of which was the fact that it would ensure that Ghana remained a no-party state in the hands of the same power-hungry ruler. The students would distribute these crudely produced pamphlets to market women, hairdressers, tailors, and other working-class people in the community. They would also distribute them to students in the secondary schools.[451]

It would appear that the student activists intended to achieve the closure of the universities by forcing the hand of government with the demonstrations as the

[451] Mahama, *My First Coup d'état*, 188.

opportunity proved very fortuitous for their anti-regime campaigns. The head of the junta, General Acheampong, came to believe so.[452] *Aluta*, the NUGS magazine, was also launched at this time to publicize the student movement's activities and to keep the pressure on government. The magazine was one of the "pamphlets" that John Mahama remembers was distributed around the country by students to encourage opposition to UNIGOV. Editorial control of *Aluta* was in the hands of the radicals within the student movement and these included Zaya Yeebo, Kwadjo Taata Ofosu, Nyeya Yen, Napoleon Abdulai and Nicholas Atampugre, Balic Kolon, Ibrahim Lubum, and Kofi Klu, all students of the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast. Zaya Yeebo, one of the radical student leaders of the time, observes in his memoirs that when the SMC clamped down on protests against the results of the referendum on UNIGOV in mid-1978, the regime found "the NUGS and its organ *Aluta* almost impregnable and unrepressible (sic)." The magazine and the comradeship of its editorial board, even under the threat of arrests, would remain voices of student activism throughout the late 1970s.[453]

Students also played important roles in some of the other pressure groups that emerged during the period especially the People's Movement for Freedom and Justice (PMFJ), formed in January 1978.[454] The linkages to the different segments of the wider opposition to the SMC regime that the students could provide and their general mobility and

[452] Asamoah, *The Experience of a Non-Conformist*, 240.

[453] Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 19-20, 36, 292. Also see Yen, "I am nobody's small boy" on their exploits working on *Aluta* and distributing it around the country.

[454] Asamoah, *The Experience of a Non-Conformist*, 242.

organizing made them key agents in the political crisis of the late 1970s. When the government banned anti-UNIGOV groups such as the PMFJ, the Third Force and the Front for the Prevention of Dictatorship in April 1978 after the referendum on the concept, the student movement remained the active voice against the regime. The students rejected General Acheampong's pleas to return to the lecture room and sustained the opposition to the SMC through 1979.[455]

Barbara Okeke observes that the SMC regime focused on suppressing the sources of dissent instead of dealing with the causes. In so doing, the student movement became the primary targets of the government for the students "not only articulated the discontents of the people, but were in the forefront of the opposition to the military government." Okeke, an anthropologist, was a witness to the political crisis in 1979 and also covered the events for the *West Africa* magazine.[456] What she witnessed in 1979 was a culmination of student activism in the preceding years. Indeed, as some of the leading members of the professional associations and pressure groups such as the PMFJ joined various emerging political parties in preparation for the promised multi-party elections of mid-1979, the student movement remained the only independent force that pushed for the democratization of politics without seeking partisan political advantage.

[455] Pamidy Amoah, "BANNED: No more PMFJ; 2 Others Dropped," *Daily Graphic*, April 1978.

[456] Barbara E. Okeke, *4 June: A Revolution Betrayed* (Enugu, Nigeria: Ikenga Publishers, 1982), 36-62, and acknowledgements. Barbara E. Okeke is a nom de guerre for Barbara Harrell-Bond, the distinguished pioneer of African refugees studies. See Gamal Nkrumah, "Barbara Harrell Bond: This Barbara doesn't beat around the bush. For the good of it." *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 659, 9-15 October 2003. (Accessed 21 March 2015).

Student activism also served as the important link between civilian opposition to the SMC regime and the subsequent revolt by the lower ranks of the military, which culminated in the June 4th uprising of 1979. The coup toppled the Supreme Military Council. The mismanagement and corruption of the NRC/SMC created deep dissatisfaction within the lower ranks of the Ghanaian military. The rank and file of the military was affected by the general economic decline in the country while the perception grew that the top brass of the military did not care about the welfare of the lower ranks. As more senior officers moved into government and the headship of state corporations, the top brass of the military became more divorced from the everyday concerns of the rank and file. Throughout the rule of the NRC-SMC I-SMC II, cliques of junior officers and the members of the other ranks contemplated ways to stop the political rot and the economic decline in the military and the wider society. This would be the justification for the failed coup on May 15, 1979, led by junior Ghana Air Force officer, Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings. The mutiny forced the internal tensions within the military into the open and added extra pressure on the SMC II regime, which was now focused on supervising the announced elections and handing over power. The reasons for the action of the mutineers, made know during their trial, reflected the general social dissatisfaction against the military government and especially among students. As Zaya Yeebo notes "the sentiments attributed to Rawlings [during his trial] had been harped upon by the National Union of Ghana Students and other radical democratic movements in all their struggles prior to this time."[457]

[457] Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 26.

The link between the lower ranks of the military seeking political change and the student movement would be renewed the following month on June 4th, when another coup would be successfully executed to free the mutineers of May 15 and bring the rule of the SMC to an end. Jerry John Rawlings, the leader of the May 15th mutiny, would be become the head of the new military junta, called the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The observations of Zaya Yeebo point to students' deep involvement in the events of June 4th. He recalls that even before the coup had become a fait accompli, some of the coup plotters went to the University of Ghana to lobby for student support. The representatives of the coup plotters, at an emergency meeting of the Student Representative Council of Legon, appealed for students to go into the streets to demonstrate in support of the coup in order to give it popular support. The SRC resolved to formally support the coup but left the decision to go into the streets to express their solidarity to individual students, as there was ongoing resistance from troops loyal to the SMC. Nevertheless,

> Individual students decided to support the rebelling soldiers. Two bus loads of students chanting anti-SMC slogans went to Accra and demonstrated in support of the ranks while fighting was still in progress. This show of solidarity, even before the issue of power was finally resolved, was to create a lasting bind between radical students and the lower ranks of the armed forces.[458]

The political activism of students had become so central to popular politics to require the support of students in what was ordinarily a military insurrectionary project. The subaltern alliance of the lower ranks of the military and the students was also predicated on the historically constructed generational politics of youth: it recalled and was informed

[458] Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 27.

by the Asafo and other historical iterations of Ghanaian youth politics and political formations, which questioned or rebelled against authority-holders, checked the abuse of power, and deposed unwanted leaders. Student support for the lower ranks' revolt would also compel the AFRC regime to commit itself to returning the country to democratic rule.

Conclusion

The late 1960s and 1970s was the period of the maturation of the student movement in Ghana. Students crafted an independent role in national politics which allowed them to champion the cause of the common man and hold governments accountable. In the tradition of the Asafo, students supported governments when they governed well but were also effectively quick in catalyzing opposition to governmental incompetence, corruption and authoritarianism. They fearlessly engaged the civilian administration of the PP government in the early 1970s and were in the forefront of the struggles against the dictatorship of the SMC in the mid to late 1970s. So central had students become in popular politics that the AFRC looked to their support to provide a popular base for their intervention in national politics in June 1979.

Epilogue:

Student and Youth Politics beyond the '70s

On July 3, 1979, students of the University of Ghana organized a well-attended demonstration in support of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, the military regime that had taken the reins of government following the coup a few weeks before on June 4. The cause of the students' demonstration was the uproar of international condemnation that followed the AFRC's execution by firing squad of three former heads of state and others who were prominent members of the deposed military junta, the Supreme Military Council.[459] General Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, ex-chair of the SMC regime, and General Edward Kwaku Utuka, member of the SMC and former Commander of the Border Guard, were the first to be executed on June 16 for using their positions in government to illegally amass wealth and for reckless dissipation of state funds.[460] Ten days later, on June 26, the AFRC executed another group of six prominent Ghanaians including Lieutenant-General Frederick William Akuffo, who took over the leadership of the SMC regime in its final years from Acheampong; Major General Robert Ebenezer Abosey Kotei former Chief of Defence Staff; Air Vice Marshall George Yaw Boakye, former Air Force Commander; Rear Admiral Joy Amedume, former Navy Commander; Colonel Roger Felli, former Commissioner for Foreign Affairs; and Lieutenant-General Okatakyie Akwasi Amankwa Afrifa, head of state and chairman of the National Liberation Council of 1966-1969. The international criticisms and condemnation of these executions were quick and trenchant but they only served to rally student support for the

[459] Okeke, *A Revolution Betrayed*, 58.

[460] Kidd Darko and C. S. Buabeng, "Kutu, Utuka Executed," *Daily Graphic*, 16 June 1979.

AFRC. Though the student movement under the leadership of the NUGS had provided critical support to the AFRC since the June 4 coup, some students were still wary of the military in national politics given their experience with the SMC. The cautious support would become an enthusiastic one after the executions and the international condemnations that followed it. Bearing placards with inscriptions that praised the executions and chanting "Let the blood flow", the students delivered protest letters to the embassies of the countries that had condemned the executions. The US, Britain and Nigeria particularly earned the ire of the students who accused the governments of these countries of hypocrisy. Nigeria had in response to the last round of executions cut off its supply of oil to Ghana and reduced Ghana's 90-day credit to 30 days, an action that only elicited retort such as "Keep your oil, we'll burn wood" from the students. A few days before the Legon demonstration, students of the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi had embarked on a similar demonstration in support of the executions and reacted angrily to the international condemnation. The All Africa Students Union declaimed "Western imperialists and their African allies not to interfere in the affairs of Ghana" and asserted that "[n]o economic blockade against Ghana…would dampen the spirit behind the revolution."[461]

Students, together with other segments of Ghanaian society including organized labor, supported the executions as part of the AFRC's promised "house-cleaning exercise", which was to rid the military and government of corruption, regenerate public morality and set the country on course to alleviate the hardships facing ordinary people. "We will

[461] Okeke, *A Revolution Betrayed*, 55-59. Also see Kojo Yankah, *The Trial of J. J. Rawlings: Echoes of the 31st December Revolution* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1986), 31-37.

do everything to bring back the prestige and glory of the common man," Captain Boakye Djan, member and spokesman of the AFRC, declared in one of many such populist speeches by the junta even as he promised a thoroughgoing house-cleaning exercise.[462] The support of the students to the AFRC also rested on the junta's commitment to return the country to civilian constitutional rule. The AFRC had justified this commitment by sticking to the timetable that the SMC had established for a return to civilian democratic rule before it was removed from power. A few days after taking power, the AFRC also had meetings with candidates of the political parties campaigning towards the elections and assured them of its commitment to the election timetable. A week before the second executions, elections were held as originally planned. These actions won over the student movement, which had established itself as a democratic force in Ghanaian politics.

This late 1970s collaboration between the lower ranks of the military and student activists was the beginning of a relationship that extended into the 1980s when the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), another military regime, took over government after removing the civilian government of the People's National Party (PNP) in a coup in December 1981. This marked a number of transformations in youth and students politics in Ghana. The NUGS as the mainstream national student organization would continue as a pressure group throughout the 1980s and 1990s but many of its left-leaning leaders and activists would move from being critics of government and articulators of public interests to joining the ruling PNDC in various capacities in the 1980s. As Paul Nugent observes, due to the central role of students in the opposition to the SMC in the late 1970s, student

[462] "We'll Leave No Stone Unturned, Boakye Gyan," *Daily Graphic*, 16 June 1979.

leaders "aspired to an even more influential role in national affairs."[463] Political and economic developments from late 1979 to 1981 would facilitate the aspirations of these student leaders.

The road to a coup and a not-so-provisional junta: The military and students into the 80s

For the three months that the AFRC was in power after the coup of 1979 it worked on keeping the student movement as an ally. An AFRC representative, Air Force Officer Richard Forjoe, was appointed as a liaison between the junta and the students. Student representatives were also invited to serve on sub-committees of the AFRC. Jerry John Rawlings often addressed the students. In a speech to the students to assure them that none of the members of the establishment was being shelved from punishment, Rawlings acknowledged

> how students had stood in the forefront of resistance to tyranny in the country and how they relentlessly struggled against [the] corrupt and bankrupt leadership [of the SMC]…[W]e of the AFRC value your support and your initiative in seeking to advance the revolution.

Students travelled to the countryside to spread the supposed revolutionary messages of the AFRC, engage in community service, work on farms, and help in crop harvests among others.[464]

For student and youth activism, the most significant development of the period was the emergence of various student-dominated left-leaning organizations, some of which had soldiers as members as well. The dominant organizations were the June Four Movement

[463] Nugent, *Big Men Small Boys*, 32.

[464] *Ghanaian Times*, 21 July 1979. Cited in Okeke, *A Revolution Betrayed*, 80, 84-85.

(JFM) and the New Democratic Movement (NDM). Captain Boakye Djan, the second-in-command of the AFRC and its spokesman, started the June Four Movement, according to Zaya Yeebo who was a member. The movers and shakers were however the leftist students who saw in it a vanguard for bringing about revolutionary change in the politics of the country. Djan's leftist politics dated back to his days as a student activist at the University of Ghana in the late 1960s. He was an editor of the *Legonite* in 1967 and is most likely the writer of the letter which lambasted the university authorities of spewing "plain nonsensical clap trap" when they complained of student indiscipline.[465] His background facilitated his relationship with the student members of the JFM. Other prominent members of the June Four Movement included student leaders such as Zaya Yeebo, Nyeya Yen, Napoleon Abdulai, Nicholas Atampugre, Kwesi Adu, and Taata Ofosu among others. Many of these student leaders served on the editorial board of the student magazine, *Aluta*, and were in the forefront of the opposition to the SMC and the UNIGOV idea. The JFM invited Jerry John Rawlings, leader of the AFRC, to join the group in 1980 and soon became its chairman. The New Democratic Movement was formed in 1980 by a group of students and academics. It set itself the task of articulating the problems of ordinary Ghanaians and pointing out the failures of the government of the PNP and the opposition. There were other groups such as the People's Revolutionary League of Ghana (PRLG), the Movement for Peace and Democracy (MOPAD), and the Movement on National Affairs (MONAS), a splinter group from the JFM.[466]

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[465] Boakye Djang, "Our University and the problem of discipline – An open letter to the 'authorities'," *Legonite*, Lent 1966. See Chapter 5.

[466] Kevin Shellington, *Ghana and the Rawlings Factor* (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1992), 76-77; Nugent, *Big Men Small Boys*, 33; Yankah, *The Trial of J. J. Rawlings*, 57-58, and Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 35-46.

The failures of the civilian government of the PNP, under the presidency of Dr. Hilla Limann, helped to rally the leftwing of the student movement to the radicalism of the JFM and other groups. Having been elected to power in September 1979, the PNP struggled to arrest the decline of the Ghanaian economy and political corruption. Riven by internal feuds and factional disputes, the ruling party opened itself to widespread criticisms and alienated many of the pro-democratic forces including the students. The NUGS joined other groups including the TUC to voice its opposition against how the PNP was running the country. For the left-wing elements in the student movement, the rule of the PNP heightened the need for a revolutionary mass movement. Many of them had only scorn for the PNP's claim to be a political descendant of Nkrumah's CPP. The university provided a sanctuary for Jerry Rawlings and his co-conspirators to plot against the PNP.[467]

When the coup of 1981, led by Jerry Rawlings, occurred some of the groups formed in late 1979 and 1980 saw in it the opportunity to bring about the awaited revolution. Indeed, the PNDC was largely seen as the regime of youth and students. Many former student leaders and activists were coopted into public office under the PNDC in various capacities. Among these activists were Zaya Yeebo, Napoleon Abdulai, Nicholas Atampugre, Kofi Totobi Quakyi, Nyeya Yen, Kwesi Adu and Ato Austin. The PNDC also reached out to the university community to recruit some academics to serve in the regime. These included Emmanuel Hansen, Kwesi Botchwey, Tsatsu Tsikata, Ama Ata

[467] Yeebo, *The Struggle for Popular Power*, 109.

Aidoo and Kofi Awoonor among others. Some of these leftist academics and former student leaders stayed in the PNDC for its 11-year stay in power. Others fell out with the regime, resigned, were purged, imprisoned or had to go into exile. Faced with the daunting task of managing the deteriorating economy of the country, the PNDC abandoned its touted socialist revolution and looked to the IMF and the World Bank for support. This was partly the reason why some of the former student leaders fell out with the regime. Ideological dissension, political intrigue, distrust and suspicions, and a jostle for power within the regime including attempted coups also contributed to the parting of ways. The NUGS after initially supporting the PNDC quickly came to oppose it. It remained one of the groups that pressured the PNDC for economic and political reforms throughout the 1980s, in the face of the threats and intimidation of the regime.[468]

The return to democratic rule: youth and student politics, and popular culture

The state of Ghanaian youth and student politics since Ghana's return to democratic rule can be seen in two main domains: the activism of the National Union of Ghana Students in relation to the student wings of national political parties and in popular culture, specifically what has been termed the hip-life movement.[469] There are continuities in these areas with earlier manifestations of youth politics but there have also been marked departures, especially in the activism of students. From its involvement in the advocacy for democratic reforms and subsequent participation in the broad national consultations

[468] Yeebo, *Struggle for Popular Power*, 107-171, and Shillington, *Ghana and the Rawlings Factor*, 113.

[469] See Jesse Weaver Shipley, *Living the Hiplife: Celebrity and Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Popular Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Halifu Osumare, *The Hiplife in Ghana* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Harry Odamtten, "Hip Hop Speaks, Hip-Life Answers," in *The African Hip-Hop Reader*, ed. Paul Saucier, (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2011).

that fed into the formulation and promulgation of the 1992 democratic constitution, the National Union of Ghana Students has over the period since then gradually lost its position as an influential voice in national politics. Though it continued its tradition of commenting on national issues through the issuance of conference communiqués and resolutions, the NUGS in recent times has come to be seen largely as only a student welfare body, more interested in agitating over issues such as the living conditions of students on campus, negotiations for increases in student loans and their timely payment as well as protests against government cost-sharing policies in higher education. On the latter issue, the union organized a few demonstrations in the late 1990s, which resulted in the brief closure of the tertiary institutions in 1998 and 1999. Since then, however, the NUGS has been unable to remain an influential voice on national issues.

In a sense, the NUGS has become a casualty of Ghana's multi-party democratic politics. The independent political space that it occupied and which allowed it to carry the overall support of students of higher education in national affairs has been crowded out by national partisan politics through the student branches of Ghana's two leading political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The Tertiary Education Institutions Network (TEIN) of the National Democratic Congress and the Tertiary Students Confederacy (TESCON) of the New Patriotic Party represent these two political parties on the campuses of the universities and the polytechnics. The smaller parties such as the Nkrumahist Convention People's Party (CPP) and the People's National Convention (PNC) also have their student wings though they do not have the same influence, a situation that is reflective of their weak standing in

national electoral politics. The partisan political activities of these student branches on campus have made it difficult for the NUGS to articulate independent positions on national issues that carry the support of the majority of the students. There is widespread concern on the campuses about how these parties have sought to infiltrate student politics by sponsoring candidates for Junior Common Room, Student Representative Council and NUGS elections. Though most candidates in these elections since the late 1990s have denied such partisan support, the perception has remained as the NUGS struggles to maintain any semblance of its old self. Student activists now seek to turn the capital of their activist experience and tertiary education into the pursuit of influence and office in their respective political parties with an eye on public office when their parties are in power.

Ghana's return to democratic rule in the early 1990s also coincided with and gave vent to a revival in popular cultural production, most epitomized by the urban youth music genre called *Hiplife*. Drawing on the older Ghanaian music genre, Highlife, and global musical sounds particularly American hip-hop and rap, the exponents of *hiplife* have sought to rap about and explicate the contemporary urban youth experience. Hiplife music speaks about, to and for youth. Even when the music is not overtly political, it still purveys ideas that critique power holders and promote politics that is defiant of generational and gendered expectations. As Glorya Cho argues, hiplife music is an alternative public sphere in which young Ghanaians express "youths' individual and group agency in relation to urbanization, the globalization of popular culture and exclusion from the adult public." The popular musical movement has socio-political value, Cho observes, as it

gives voice to youth and expands the Ghanaian public sphere by allowing access to a broader spectrum of young men and women.[470] The emergence of the hiplife musical movement was helped by a revival in urban nightlife and the proliferation of the mass media, particularly radio and television from the early 1990s, processes that were not unrelated to the return to democratic rule. In the ensuing competitive politics, political parties have sought to mobilize youth and utilize youth popular culture and its icons as mobilizers.

In terms of political significance, there are continuities between hiplife and popular music in earlier periods in Ghanaian history. In this sense, popular culture has been important in facilitating youth's construction of alternative political identities. Hiplife recalls the challenges of the youthful agents of the dance and music styles of the early colonial period to the political, generational and gendered hierarchies of Gold Coast society.[471] Similarly, from the late colonial period through to the post-colonial era of the 1960s and 1970s, genres of popular theatre and music came to have political significance as they critiqued the managers of the Ghanaian state.[472] In these popular cultural spaces, young people sought to create new identities with the intension of distancing themselves from the older generation whom they considered 'colo,' a shortening of "colonial." Increased globalization and the availability of transnational cultural resources also helped

[470] Glorya Cho, "Hiplife, Cultural Agency and the Youth Counter-Public in the Ghanaian Public Sphere," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 45, no. 4 (2010), 407-416.

[471] See Chapter 2.

[472] John Collins, "Ghanaian Highlife," 67; Sjaark van der Geest and Nimrod Asante-Darko, "The Political Meaning of Highlife Songs in Ghana," *African Studies Review*, 25, 1 (March 1982): 27-35; and, Kofi E. Agovi, "The Political Relevance of Ghanaian Highlife Songs since 1957," *Research in African Literatures* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 194-201.

to shape the way postcolonial Ghanaian youths saw themselves and sought to represent themselves.[473] The rise and global spread of reggae music, for instance, was important in providing a language and vehicle for youths' critiques of the political elite in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa.[474] Given hiplife's possibilities as a political force, as observed of hip hop in other African countries,[475] it is not surprising that some of the voices that have called for Ghana's politics and political culture to loosen up its gerontocratic bent have come from the hiplife community. Hiplife musician, Bice Osei Kuffuor, known by his stage name *Obour*, who is also the current president of the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA), has advocated for the constitutionally stipulated qualifying age of 40 years for aspirants to the Ghanaian presidency to be lowered. Obuor told the national daily, the *Daily Graphic*, in 2008:

> I believe [Ghana's] Constitution is not fair to the youth by pegging the age to contest for the presidency at 40…Cutting out the youth entirely from holding that position is not good for the nation

He intended to make the issue of youth's increased participation in state politics the subject of a national campaign.[476] He articulated a widespread sentiment among Ghanaian youth about their access to national political office generally and not just the

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[473] Steven Salm, "The Bukom Boys," 1-4.

[474] Akyeampong, "Youth Culture, Cannabis and Violence in Post-colonial West Africa"; John Collins, "A Social History of Ghanaian Popular Entertainment since Independence," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, 9 (2005): 24-25; and Neil J. Savishinsky, "Rastafari in the Promised Land: The Spread of a Jamaican Socio-Religious Movement and its Music and Culture Among the Youth of Ghana and Senegambia," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1993).

[475] See Msia Kibona Clark and Mickie Mwanzia Koster, eds., *Hip Hop and Social Change in Africa* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014) and Eric Charry, ed., *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

[476] "Lower age for the Presidency - Obuor," *Modern Ghana News* (2 June 2008), http://www.modernghana.com/news/167945/1/lower-age-for-presidency-obuor.html# (Accessed online 20 April 2015).

presidency. Such sentiments may have influenced the current government to appoint a youthful crop of people into ministerial positions. Some of these young ministers were student leaders. The direct political influence of the hiplife movement on national politics is difficult to measure but the possibility exist for the movement and its icons to become central pillars of youth politics in contemporary Ghana, and thus help to sustain the tradition of youth political activism which dates back to the early colonial period.

Conclusion

Youth have been significant players in political developments in Ghana. As political subjects, Ghanaian youth challenged the gerontocratic orientation of the country's political culture and became catalysts for socio-political change at significant junctures in its colonial and postcolonial history. There were several manifestations of youth politics during that period. Youth utilized the new dance and music styles of the early decades of the 1900s to give themselves a political voice and challenge social hierarchies. They successfully combined their anti-chief and anti-colonial politics from the 1930s into a mass nationalist movement that ultimately led to the country's decolonization in the late 1950s. In the 1960s and 1970s, student activism, the most significant expression of youth politics at the national level, constituted a bulwark against authoritarianism, articulated public interests, and pushed for political and economic reforms. This history informed the political developments of the 1980s. Since Ghana's return to democratic rule, youth politics has undergone some changes while reflecting certain historical continuities. The politics of youth is set to remain relevant in different iterations as the country's democracy matures.

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