

# ECAS 2013

5<sup>th</sup> European Conference on African Studies (Lisbon)

June  
27-29



African Dynamics in a Multipolar World

ISCTE - Lisbon University Institute

## **ECAS 2013**

5<sup>th</sup> European Conference on African Studies

*African Dynamics in a Multipolar World*

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ISBN: 978-989-732-364-5

## **SUPPORT TO AFRICAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS BY NKRUMAH'S GHANA**

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## Abstract

*Between 1957 and 1966, Ghana hosted a number of African nationalist parties and it helped them in achieving independence and in strengthening their power inside the nations. Ghana granted them financial aid and it provided political training to party members. Kwame Nkrumah wanted particularly to promote the Convention People's Party as a model for all the nationalist parties. Some institutions had been created in Ghana with the purpose of achieving these goals. The Ideological Institute of Winneba was established in 1961 to teach to both CPP members and other African nationalists how to work with the masses in the process of nation building. This paper illustrates the action of these institutions, such as the Ideological Institute and the Bureau of African Affairs, using mostly new and unpublished archival sources.*

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Ghana, Nkrumah, Bureau of African Affairs, Convention People's Party

This paper is mainly based on the findings made during the work for my present research. Currently I'm working on a thesis concerning the history of the Pan-African foreign policy of Ghana at the time of Nkrumah (1957-1966). I particularly deal with the history of what I call the "Pan-African institutions" of Ghana, which were the Bureau of African Affairs, the African Affairs Centre and the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute of Winneba.<sup>1</sup>

This research topic has been partially discussed before by other scholars or protagonists of these facts (e.g. Thompson, 1969; Dei-Anang, 1975; Adom, 1991; Armah, 2004). What can be considered innovative is the use of a number of new sources. Indeed, this research is based on documents which, in many cases, have never been used before. Among these new sources, the most important ones are those which are kept in the archive of the Bureau of African Affairs.<sup>2</sup> This archive includes documents of the Bureau and also the papers of the office of George Padmore at the time of his appointment as Adviser to the Prime Minister on African Affairs (1957-1959). There are also papers of the African Affairs Centre and some documents of the Ideological Institute of Winneba. Moreover, I used the papers of the British Foreign Office and the British Intelligence in London and also some interviews to protagonists of these facts.

These sources had been used to study the action of Ghana in the African liberation process. They are particularly interesting to understand the degree of influence which Ghana had in the establishment and development of a number of nationalist parties.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bureau of African Affairs (1957-1966) was an information agency created for supporting African liberation movements. The African Affairs Centre (1958-1966) was a centre created to provide accommodation and political training to African freedom fighters in Accra. The Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute (1961-1966) was an ideological school for both the Ghanaian ruling party (Convention People's Party) and the African freedom fighters hosted in Ghana.

<sup>2</sup> The archive of the Bureau of African Affairs is kept at the George Padmore Research Library on African Affairs in Accra.

### **The Ghanaian model of a nationalist party**

Nationalism in Africa developed mainly thanks to the action of nationalist movements and parties. In this field Ghana played a major role. During the independence period, Accra became one of the most important shelters for political refugees and freedom fighters. Together with Guinea, Algeria, Egypt and Tanzania, Ghana offered its country as the base for the actions of African liberation movements. It also became the ground where to give political visibility to their struggles. But unlike Conakry, Algeri or Dar Es-Salaam, Accra was far from the hostilities. Its importance didn't lie on a strategic geographical position but on the attraction of a successful political model, promoted through specific institutions and agencies. Ghana could count on its prestige being the first Sub-Saharan colony to gain independence. Furthermore, Ghana could count on a series of institutions created specifically for promoting Pan-Africanism and the Ghanaian model of nationalism throughout the continent. This model was clearly based on the action of its ruling party: the Convention People's Party (CPP).

Even though the Convention People's Party was not the first nationalist party established in Africa, it soon became one of the most effective and successful ones.<sup>3</sup> The CPP proved to be very effective in channelling the forces of the Gold Coast in the struggle for independence, while avoiding at the same time the further development of regionalist and tribal rival parties. According to C.R.L. James (1982) and George Padmore (1957) the CPP had been the first party to apply the indications of the 1945 Manchester Pan-African congress. The Congress had indeed specifically called for the establishment of a modern mass nationalist movement in order to gain a true independence from the colonial powers. The keywords of the Congress were "organisation of the masses" (History of the Pan-African Congress, 1963, p.7) and the use of

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<sup>3</sup> In Ghana, older examples of nationalist parties are The Aborigines' Rights Protection Society (founded in 1897), the National Congress of British West Africa (founded in 1920 and led by Casely Hayford) and the United Gold Coast Convention (founded in 1947). The Convention People's Party was established in 1949.

“Positive Action” to gain freedom.<sup>4</sup> Padmore (1957) saw in the CPP and its victory at the 1951 Gold Coast elections the practical realization of such indications:

This was the first victory for the ideology of Pan-Africanism. It proved definitely the effectiveness of organization and Positive Action based on non-violent methods. ‘Organization decides everything’ [...] the continued strength of the CPP has rested on its superb organization. In the words of the Declaration of the Fifth Pan-African Congress, ‘today there is only one road to effective action – the organization of the masses’(p.158).

Similarly, James (1982) underlined how successful the CPP had been in applying the Manchester's guidelines for action. “It took the revolution in the Gold Coast itself to make possible a true evaluation of this policy elaborated in 1945. So it always is with a theory” (p.74).

Being so successful, the CPP was soon promoted as a model by Ghana. Furthermore, Nkrumah strongly believed it had a mission to fulfill for all Africa. Indeed, according to Nkrumah (Obeng, 2009), the Convention People's Party was “pitchforked by historical circumstances into the spear-head and vanguard of the gigantic struggle for the total liberation of Africa and the independence and unity of African states”.( pp. 273-274).

Which were then the main features of the CPP as a model nationalist party?

- 1) The party was spread in the whole territory through a system of local branches;
- 2) it had applied successfully the Positive Action. This tactic soon became a model for other independence struggles in Africa;
- 3) it was an inter-ethnic party, trying to promote centralization against federalism;
- 4) it was a party which represented various classes of Ghanaian society;

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<sup>4</sup> The Positive Action was a political tactic specifically designed for Africa by Garba-Jahumpa and other members of the Manchester Congress. It was a sort of Ghandian non-violent method of struggle based on boycotts and civil disobedience. Nkrumah launched the Positive Action during 1950.

- 5) it was a well structured party, with specific wings for youth, women, workers etc.;
- 6) it was a party with a strong leadership: its slogan was: "The CPP is Nkrumah and Nkrumah is the CPP";
- 7) its aim for the nation was an economical and social revolution;
- 8) it had a modern and powerful propaganda machinery.

### **Support to African nationalist parties**

All these characteristics became the basis for the model nationalist party promoted by Ghana throughout Africa. Since Ghana's independence both Nkrumah and Padmore, who became his adviser on African Affairs, began to work on a framework to support African liberation and unity. They wanted to promote Pan-Africanism and at the same time the Ghanaian independence struggle as models for other territories in Africa. Padmore and Nkrumah worked on the establishment of two institutions for achieving these targets: the Office of the Adviser to the Prime Minister on African Affairs (led by Padmore and later renamed the Bureau of African Affairs after his death in 1959) and the African Affairs Centre (led by Ras Makonnen). Through these offices they began to spread the influence of Ghana everywhere in Africa among the liberation and nationalist movements.

During 1958, Ghana reached its political peak. Aiming at African liberation it shared with Egypt the role of favorite refuge for African nationalists. The turning point proved to be the All-African People's Conference hosted in Accra in December 1958. Unlike the other conference held in Accra the same year, this one was not organized by Ghana's state. On the contrary, it was a gathering organized specifically by the CPP for other nationalist parties and movements of Africa. The aim was clear: the Ghanaian struggle for independence was once

again presented as a model for other liberation struggles. The CPP was presented as the best weapon to achieve such independence. From then on Ghana proposed its country as a refuge for all the African nationalists and also a source of help for their parties. This work was started by Padmore and after his death in 1959 it was carried on by the newly established Bureau of African Affairs.

During Nkrumah's years a number of important nationalist parties were supported by Ghana and their members were hosted in Accra and trained in party politics and administration. The aim was to create a new generation of nationalist militants and also to furnish the liberation movement with the necessary personnel to build their nations after independence.

Among the most important parties supported and financed by Ghana they can be included: the *Union de Populations du Cameroun*, the Basutoland Congress Party, the Bechuanaland People's Party, the Malawi Congress Party, the Pan-Africanist Congress, the Z.A.N.U. and Z.A.P.U. of Southern Rhodesia, the United National Independence Party of Northern Rhodesia, the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress and the Swaziland Progressive party, both of which from Swaziland, the African National Congress, the *Movimento Popular de Libertação do Angola*, the UDENAMO and many others.

Reading through the documents kept in the Bureau of African Affairs archive it is possible to understand how Ghana provided financial support and political guidance to these liberation movements. Moreover, it is possible to comprehend how Ghana chose which parties to support. Indeed, for years it was believed that Ghana had financed practically every party in Africa. Scott Thompson (1969), for instance, quotes Kodjo Botsio in saying: "We had financed every party. Every election. They all looked at us!" (p.67).

Actually, there was a precise plan on Ghana's side to only back those parties which were following the Ghanaian guidelines in terms of internal and external policies. As the sources consulted show, the Bureau of African Affairs was providing support only in case the parties proved to be in line with the Ghanaian policies. Specific cross-reference checks were made to be sure on the parties supported.

The CPP had always been the model of reference. After the death of Padmore the references on this model increased. It might be useful to read through a report, submitted by the Ghanaian Minister of External Affairs to the Bureau of African Affairs in November 1960. It is a secret report on Nyasaland in which the Bureau was informed on the recent development in the politics of the country, then part of the Central African Federation. In the part concerning politics, the minister underlined the successes of the Ghanaian policy in influencing the Malawi Congress Party. Quoting from the text:

Dr. Banda's position as President of the Party is supreme and unchallenged and he enjoys the fanatic adoration of the masses. There is no doubt whatsoever that he has full effective control of the party machinery. He has modelled his party on the organizational techniques he acquired from the Convention People's Party in Ghana including the slogans, procedures at rallies, the organization of women, youth and party activists, the organization and function of the Executive and even the basic policies. These have proved very effective. [...] [The Malawi Congress Party] is completely aligned in policy and practice to the stand taken by Ghana in international, particularly African affairs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> AGPL (Archive of George Padmore Library - Accra), BAA/370, Report from the Minister of External Affairs to the Bureau of African Affairs, "Political Survey of Nyasaland", 22 November 1960.



This is only one of the many cases in which the CPP emerges as the model for the other nationalist parties. It is important, moreover, to note that the parties hosted in Accra were provided not only with money but also with political training. In some cases, specific courses were organized at the African Affairs Centre, but in other cases members of these parties could make use of the structure of the CPP itself. It is the case, for example, of the Sawaba Party of Niger. In this case the fusion with the CPP framework became practical as, according to the Bureau of African Affairs files, the Sawaba members requested and obtained CPP membership cards in October 1959. It was not only a tactical reason as the Sawaba representative clearly stated their will to associate with a party which had at the time an enormous consensus in West Africa.<sup>6</sup>

In some cases the CPP model was adopted integrally. It is the case, for example, of the Bechuanaland People's Party. The programme of this party for the years 1963/64 is kept in a file of the archive of the Bureau of African Affairs.<sup>7</sup> Reading through the text it is possible to notice a number of similarities between the party structure and activities and the ones of the CPP. Even the basic principles of the party were modelled on those of the Convention People's Party (stated in the party charter of 1950).

In some other cases Ghana, through the Bureau, also influenced the development of institutions of the new states. For example, Ghana advised the two main opposition parties of Swaziland (both supported by Accra), on the ongoing works for the constitution of their country.<sup>8</sup> Also, Ghana kept in touch with the Basutoland Congress Party on the constitution orks

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<sup>6</sup> AGPL, un-catalogued (BN-Letters for Action by African Affairs Committee), Letter, Sawaba Party members to the Chairman of Finance and Management Committee (part of the African Affairs Committee), 28 October 1959.

<sup>7</sup> AGPL, un-catalogued (BC- Conference of Organisation of African Unity – Ghana – Sept. 1965), "The B.P.P.'s Proposed Programme for 1963/64", undated.

<sup>8</sup> AGPL, un-catalogued (BB-Secretary's Personal Correspondence, BAA/1A), Letter, Barden (BAA) to Mabuza (President of the Swaziland Progressive Party), 1<sup>st</sup> April 1965.

of Basutoland. However, in this case, it is less clear whether Accra had any role in the writing of the charter.<sup>9</sup>

### **Nkrumahism and the Ideological Institute of Winneba**

After 1961, Ghana lived a wave of radicalization. It not only affected the Ghanaian state, but also its influence abroad. Since then, the initiatives to extend Ghana's political influence in the continent increased. Nkrumahism became the official ideology of Ghana and all the Ghanaian Pan-African institutions had to work to spread its message to the entire continent. For these reasons the political press and the radio were developed. For the same reason, a new ideological manual was also prepared by Nkrumah. It is "Consciencism". Interestingly, in this book Nkrumah once more describes the CPP as the model party for the whole continent (Nkrumah, 1964, p.100). In this period Nkrumah also began to push for a single-party model state. In his plans, it was likely to be extended with the prospect of the establishment of a continental government. The plan of extending the influence of Nkrumahism in the whole continent was at the time taken seriously by western powers. A series of reports of the British Foreign Office and British Intelligence describe the Ghanaian plans to extend the Nkrumahist state throughout Africa.<sup>10</sup>

During 1961, there also was the official opening of courses at the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute of Winneba. The Institute was probably the most audacious experiment

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<sup>9</sup> A series of reports both produced by the Basutoland Congress Party and the British Colonial Office are included in the file: AGPL - un-catalogued (BC- Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference).

<sup>10</sup> For instance, see BNA (British National Archives) – DO/195/135, Letter, Wenban-Smith to Martin, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1963.

conducted by Ghana to spread its political model throughout Africa.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it had been established in order to train in party politics and administration both the CPP members and the members of other nationalist parties. Thanks to the documents kept at the Bureau of African Affairs archive in Accra, it is possible to know the contents of the courses which ranged from nationalist propaganda to the organization of the state. The Winneba project was still developing at the time of the coup of 1966. At that moment, the influence of the school on party cadres of all of Africa had not yet reached the planned level. Some important African nationalists had however visited the institute. For instance, Robert Mugabe took courses at the Institute as well as other ZAPU party members.

## Conclusions

To give a comprehensive image of the influence Ghana had on African nationalist parties is a difficult task. It would be a massive endeavour and would require extensive historical research, which is beyond the point of this paper. Although, it has been possible to at least understand the basis of Ghanaian policies in this field. Through the analysis of the documentation, a precise plan emerges. Precise policies were specifically designed to export the Ghanaian model of internal and external policies to other African countries.

During the independence period, a great part of the African nationalist movements received help and thus were influenced by countries in competition with each other. Some of the African nationalist parties were supported by Accra, Conakry, Cairo and others, all at the same time. Ghana's influence was then not unchallenged in the field of the African liberation. It is

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<sup>11</sup> In the speech for the opening of the Institute, Nkrumah made reference to a continental model of nationalist party (Obeng, 2009): "[the students] will go back fortified in the same principle and beliefs, pursue the same objectives and aims, appreciate the same values and advocate the same themes. I see before my mind's eye a great monolithic party growing up out of this process, united and strong, spreading its protective wings over the whole Africa" (p.276).

then important not to over-emphasize the role that Ghana played in the making of African nations. Nonetheless, its role still has to be taken into consideration, analyzing each liberation process in which Ghana was involved. It is therefore particularly interesting – as I tried to show in this paper – to analyze the role which Ghana played in the making and running of African nationalist parties.

One last element must be taken into consideration. Nkrumah's star began to fade even before the coup of 1966. However, at the time of the coup, Nkrumah still had many followers in Africa. What happened afterwards was a process aimed at the removal of his political influence throughout Africa, starting obviously from Ghana itself. At the end of this operation, few countries still openly admitted having been influenced by Nkrumah's Ghana. In my opinion, it is worthwhile to work to recover an understanding of the real degree of influence which Nkrumah's Ghana had before the coup. The methodological objective of this research is to get rid of ideological interpretations on the period, which flourished after the coup. This would allow to restore a scientific historical understanding of the facts. The papers of the archive of the Bureau of African Affairs in Accra and the papers of the British Intelligence are, in my humble opinion, good instruments for achieving this target.

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## **Support to African Nationalist movements by Nkrumah's Ghana.**

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