

# **Pan Africanism and Civil Religious Performance: Kwame Nkrumah and the Independence of Ghana**

by

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## **Abstract**

Kwame Nkrumah's Independence declaration speech was widely seen as a key rhetorical moment in the fight towards decolonization in Africa. The purpose of this essay is to unravel reasons why the speech was not only quintessential to Ghana's transition into an independent nation, but also crucial to Africa's long journey towards freedom from Western imperialism. Hence, it is argued that the significance of Nkrumah's rhetorical invention is in the symbolic birth of a new nation, providing rhetorical force to the Pan Africa agenda, and in performing the role of a high priest in a civil religious ceremony with citizens of a new nation.

**Keywords:** Gold Coast, Ghana, rhetoric, Pan Africanism, Nkrumah

## **Introduction**

The birth of a new nation is usually characterized by public orations. This was the situation on the 6th of March 1957, the day of Ghana's independence. Within a period of twenty-four hours, three momentous speeches had marked the oration of Nkrumah on the birth of the new nation of Ghana. The first speech was made on the evening of the 5th of March in Parliament before members of the Assembly and the colonial government, a few minutes before midnight in Accra. The delivering of the second speech was begun to coincide with midnight at the Old Polo Grounds, across the street from the Assembly building. The third speech was delivered the next morning on the 6th of March, the day of Ghana's independence. It was delivered during the official opening of the new Parliament - the independence one.

The first and third speeches delivered by Nkrumah in Parliament(s) immediately before and after Independence, draw attention to some key issues. The first speech marked Nkrumah's last task of, in the words of Salazar (2002), "speaking on behalf of the nation to those who also spoke on behalf of it" (p. 21). It was Nkrumah's last duty as Prime Minister under the British colonial regime, leader of an old colonial Cabinet having to say farewell to representatives of the people in the Gold Coast Parliament. David Rooney (2007) reports that Nkrumah in his speech that evening on the 5th of March "looked back over the great struggle for independence and concluded with the words 'by twelve o'clock midnight, Ghana will have redeemed her lost freedom'" (p. 186). As the first and last Prime Minister of the colonial Parliament for a period of six years, Nkrumah formally needed to mark an end of colonial government business through a befitting oration in the Assembly, and he chose to do that just a few minutes before midnight, before the first hour of a nation's independence. In a rhetorical sense, the effect in the use of space (the Assembly building) and time (before midnight) for the delivery was significant, thus, preparing the audience for what was to happen at midnight: the birth of a new nation.

Again, the third speech on the morning of the 6th of March marked a new era. The Assembly was in effect differently constituted, not in terms of a change of the representatives of the people, but it marked a new period in the founding of a nation. The British colonial governor had only become a shadow of British colonial representation in the parliament of the "nation." This was certainly a dramatic change. Many dignitaries, both local and from abroad, were present to witness the first ceremonial section of the new parliament. Notable among them was the Duchess of Kent. In her speech, she expressed the cordial wishes of the Queen of England to the people of Ghana (Rooney, 2007). In a similar ceremonial tone, Nkrumah spoke about his new capacity as the head of the nation before properly constituted representatives of the Parliament of Ghana, not the Gold Coast. He delivered a lengthy speech in which he noted "the warmest feelings of friendship and goodwill" (Rooney, 2007, p. 187) which existed between Ghana and Britain even as the newly independent nation parted ways with its colonial master. The two speeches made by Nkrumah on the floor of the 'old' and the 'new' parliaments, that is, the evening of 5th March and the morning of 6th March, are important in their own rights. The former, marking the end of public deliberation within the rules and confines of the colonial administration; the latter, symbolising the beginning period not only of the deliberations of the new Assembly, but more importantly what the Assembly could freely and legitimately have as its business.

Ghana's independence had been partly borne out of parliamentary deliberation in the Gold Coast Assembly. Nkrumah's 1953 Motion for Independence was a key success of public deliberation in the colonial parliament. The various disagreements which occurred between Nkrumah and the opposition National Liberation Movement (NLM) led to many debates and issues involving Whitehall and a debate in the British Parliament (Rooney, 2007). Perhaps, this may be the reason for Nkrumah's deliberate inclusion of the public Assembly to feature prominently in the activities during the final hours to the nation's independence. But the greater battle for independence had been fought by the ordinary people on the streets and market places.

These ordinary Gold Coasters had been present at the numerous political rallies and campaigns and they represented the human force in all the demonstrations that were organised by the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) which ultimately served as an unbending force to change the policies of the British colonial government. It was the physical struggles within different parts of the colony that opened the door for legitimate discussions of independence in the colonial Assembly beginning from 1951 when Nkrumah was voted to office as Leader of Government Business. Therefore, it was rhetorically expedient for the oration marking the birth of the nation to be done in the midst of the people who symbolically worked to conceive the nation, to be witnesses to the nation's birth. In other words, the newly born belongs to the people and, therefore, it was only appropriate that they should be present during the final minutes of travail and the delivery of the nation (Salazar, 2002). In fact, the nation was born through an extempore rhetorical "performance" of Nkrumah before the people at the Old Polo Grounds in Accra.

Extempore addresses had characterized many CPP political rallies (Rooney, 2007; Timothy, 1963). Within the colonial Assembly, Nkrumah had to play by the rules of parliamentary speech, instead of his fierce public rhetoric (Timothy, 1963). However, at midnight, as he stood before the people to declare independence, those with whom he had endured through the struggles, Nkrumah's rhetoric, once again, was freed from all formal parliamentary restraints. He could reach the people with his characteristic tone and unbridled rhetorical fervour. He was once again, on a very momentous occasion, in his oratorical elements.

My take in this piece is to attempt to discuss Nkrumah's rhetorical construction of his Independence Declaration with its underlying message examining the intended effects. I will look at Nkrumah's "performance" of the nation's birth. Winding back the clock, I will also attempt to analyse and show the hidden message within the Declaration in relation to its target "audience" (Perelman, 1982, p. 14). Secondly, I will take a critical look at Nkrumah's epideictic stance as a means of highlighting the major stories and incidents behind Ghana's independence struggle. Next, I will show how he employed the speech as a means of creating solidarity and unity as a strategy to deepen the emotional effect of the address; then I will demonstrate Nkrumah's craft in his effort in revealing the new nation's foreign policy immediately after its birth. And last, I will conclude with the speech's application of civil religion as a counter hegemonic tool to colonialism.

## **The Birth of a Nation**

"At long last the battle has ended, and thus Ghana, your beloved country is free forever."

This declarative sentence ended the birth pangs of the the new nation Ghana – the first country to become independent in Africa south of the Sahara. Nkrumah, through this performative act (Austin, 1962), had symbolically ushered the Gold Coast into a nation. In other words, the rhetor's performance does not only usher a new era, but calls into being a nation which hitherto was non-existent. Nkrumah's declaration was received with a thunderous shout from the sea of people who had gathered at the Old Polo Grounds to receive the news of independence.

Hence, the independence declaration was a momentous political and a psychological activity in the life of any nation. Though the request for Gold Coast's independence had been agreed upon by Whitehall (Nkrumah, 1957, pp. 281-282), it is Nkrumah's proclamation that gave it performative power, rendering it rhetorically effective. However, the uniqueness of Nkrumah's declaration of independence transcended, calling a nation into existence. It was by giving the nation a name which in essence will embody the destiny and ideals of the new nation. Nkrumah called the new nation "Ghana" (Nkrumah, 1957). Naming the new nation is in line with the Ghanaian culture of outdoorizing the newly born. The newly born is recognised by the entire society with its identification. Without a name, the individual has no recognition within the setup of the society. In a rhetorical move, Nkrumah's declaration of independence becomes complete, partly through the name "Ghana," since "Gold Coast" as a name was a mere colonial tag which had no association or connection as a name with any traditional state within the Gold Coast. By naming the nation "Ghana," Nkrumah was rhetorically summoning into being once again that old celebrated past civilization of Africa (Padmore, 1953) into a new form as a means of giving inspiration to the new citizens.

Thus, through words, a new group of citizens were being constituted independent of their immediate past. Metaphorically, the birth of the nation constitutes the people's birth anew. The people, in a sense, are now new born babies (Salazar, 2002). Though in their old self, Nkrumah called for the people to shed off their old colonial sense of thinking in order to embrace their new selves as citizens of the new nation. He warned the people that "we must change our attitudes and our minds. We must realise that from now on we are no more a colonial but a free and independent people."

Since the essence of rhetoric is to cause change (Perelman, 1982), Nkrumah's call for a change in attitude was key to the Declaration. A nation's transition from a colonial state to independence is marked by physical changes but it has got a lot more to do with the mind. The use of symbols tends to give effect to the rhetor's performative act in declaring the nation's birth. These symbols which give physical effect to the rhetor's words can be referred to as the extrinsic rhetorical strategies which Hillbruner (1966) defines as "those factors exterior to the speech itself, although of salient significance to it" (p. 5). Nkrumah knew the importance of symbols to the people of Ghana. In an open letter to the Queen of England three months after Ghana's independence, Nkrumah justified the replacement of the Queen's effigy with his own on the Ghanaian Pound by explaining "my people cannot read or write. They've got to be shown that they are now really independent. And they can only be shown by signs" (Nkrumah, 1957). Thus, in declaring independence to the people, symbolism was to play a key role if Nkrumah's rhetorical performance was to have any meaningful effect on his audience.

Before the audience at the Polo Grounds, the Union Jack, the only flag which was known to the people of the Gold Coast, came down slowly. According to Powell (1984), "there was a stunned silence" (p. 108) among the immediate audience whilst the new colourful flag of Ghana for the first time was unfurled in the midnight skies. The new Ghanaian flag covered the wooden dais upon which Nkrumah stood with some members of his Cabinet to deliver his speech.

Whilst the audience listened to Nkrumah, they constantly beheld the new flag. With the display of the flag, Nkrumah's rhetorical declaration had been effectively augmented with symbolic visual evidence. Aside the symbol of the flag, there was also the use of sound – the national anthem. The new anthem was played so many times particularly at the end of Nkrumah's address. Perelman (1982) argues that "to create presence it is useful to insist at length upon certain elements; in prolonging the attention given them" (p. 37). The repetition of the new anthem, therefore, sustained the mood of independence and its associated images which all together deepened the emotional mood of the audience.

Nkrumah's British Secretary, Erica Powell, who was among the crowd that night, aptly summarises the mood of the audience and the effect of the nation's birth. Powell (1984) notes, "sobs could be heard and hands wiped tears from eyes. The mood was now sober, as if they suddenly realised that this child they had helped give birth to was going to be no small burden to bear" (p. 108). Nkrumah, as a rhetor, knew how to take advantage of physical setting to achieve the needed rhetorical effect (Monfils, 1977) among his audiences. Though he had declared the nation's birth in very few words, he had created the appropriate rhetorical mood to effectively reach his audience with the rest of his message.

## **Creating Solidarity and Unity**

In a complex move, Nkrumah showed appreciation to some key sections of his audience as a means of creating solidarity and unity between his government and these different groups of audiences. Whilst the mention of these groups on the surface may appear as a simple gesture, but it was a strategic rhetoric move by Nkrumah. Nkrumah's careful selection was based on major issues and developments directly connected with the independence struggle. He noted:

I want to take the opportunity to thank the chiefs and people of this country, the youth, the farmers, the women, who have so nobly fought and won this battle. Also, I want to thank the valiant ex-service men who have so cooperated with me in this mighty task of freeing our country from foreign rule and imperialism.

Nkrumah crafted these lines to achieve a multi-layered effect on both his immediate and remote audiences. For a clear understanding of his rhetorical choice, there is the need to unravel, first, what might have prompted the statement, secondly, the expectations which the audience held and, last, the intended effect of the above statement on the different sections of the audience. To do this effectively, we shall examine briefly historical accounts which inform some rhetorical choices the speaker made and how these accounts to some extent might have presently shaped the expectation(s) of the different groups which Nkrumah was supposed to address.

The first group Nkrumah mentioned was the “chiefs.” Nkrumah acknowledged them to give them some recognition. During several decades of colonial rule in the Gold Coast, traditional chiefs had played a key role within the British system of Indirect Rule. Over time, they emerged as powerful political figures within the colony. Six years before independence, Nkrumah’s Convention Peoples’ Party hatched a strategy to weaken the powers of paramount chiefs within the colony in order to give power to the ordinary people. The two main targets of Nkrumah had been the Asantehene and the Okyehene and their powerful state councils. This antagonism from Nkrumah had driven these two powerful traditional authorities to back the opposition Party, the National Liberation Movement (Rathbone, 2000). The chiefs, therefore, saw supporting the National Liberation Movement (NLM) as the means of restoring their diminishing political authorities in their traditional communities. In 1954, another key opposition movement had emerged within the northern territories of the Gold Coast. Some influential chiefs within these territories had come together to form the Northern People’s Party (NPP) to voice their displeasure over the government’s neglect of their territories in terms of development (Rathbone, 2000). With the backing of the chiefs and their people’s, the NLM posed a huge threat to the Convention Peoples’ Party. The most serious act of the NLM was its call on the colonial government for Ashantis to secede from the colony before independence (Rooney, 2007). This development presented a challenging situation for Nkrumah. At this point, the political climate within the colony had become quite volatile just before independence. This polarization, which had been fuelled mainly by the NLM with its staunch support from the chiefs, seriously attracted the attention of Whitehall which led to a debate in the British Parliament over the situation in the colony (Rooney, 2000).

For the Ashanti chiefs and people on the night of Ghana’s Independence Declaration, Nkrumah, in the words of Lee and Campbell (1994), still “remained on trial” (p. 43). Nkrumah knew he needed to address this key exigency (Bitzer, 1968) which bothered on national cohesion and unity which were necessary ingredients for stability especially after a nation’s independence. For the international audience, especially the British, Nkrumah had to demonstrate in his Independence Declaration speech that he was a leader who was ready to bridge the divisive gap among the citizens of the new republic. Therefore through his invention, he was bringing into being a nation which was ready to move in a single direction as it took its first tottering steps in freedom. Nkrumah was aware of the situation and responded to it (Bitzer, 1968). He, therefore, declared:

I am depending upon the millions of the country, the chiefs and people to help me to reshape the destiny of this country. We are prepared to build it up and make it a nation that will be respected by every other nation in the world.

By this request, Nkrumah was not only making an effort to reconcile with the chiefs, but was making an indirect promise to restore them to their old political status within the colony – an issue which had become the main bone of contention between the chieftaincy institutions and the Convention Peoples’ Party government. Through the statement, Nkrumah attempted to establish communion between himself and the chiefs.

To Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), “every technique promoting the communion of the speaker with his audience will decrease the opposition between them – an opposition which is harmful when the task of the speaker is to persuade” (p. 321). It symbolised a positive way by which Nkrumah allayed the fears of the large group of opposing chiefs who might have been harbouring a future of uncertainty after independence when Nkrumah would have assumed full control of the new state. The expression of unity was also partly Nkrumah’s attempt to signal the British colonial government of his own commitment to unity, irrespective of the long period of bickering before the nation’s independence.

Moving from the chiefs, Nkrumah strategically expressed appreciation to “the youth,” a crucial constituency upon which the CPP was built. By so doing, Nkrumah was keeping faith with this key group as part of his political strategy. Throughout Nkrumah’s fight for Ghana’s independence and beyond, the youth will be his greatest stronghold. At the nation’s independence, there was the need to acknowledge their contribution and create solidarity for the future. By duly acknowledging “the youth,” Nkrumah was indirectly invoking a shared history among the audience. He was giving meaning to the formation of his own party, the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP), and the successful fight towards the nation’s independence. In fact, he was telling the story of Ghana’s independence. A little over a decade before independence, the youth within the Gold Coast had emerged as a major force in the Gold Coast nationalism movement. Ten years prior to Ghana’s independence, the Ashanti Youth Organization had been formed (Rooney, 2007). As a political strategist, Nkrumah had carefully observed the effectiveness of the youth in the 1948 boycott and foresaw their possible influence in the larger struggle for independence. He could easily identify himself with the youth group and saw their course as part of the larger course for which he was fighting for independence. In the words of Rooney (2007), Nkrumah “gave the young men the chance to kick over their frustrations with a vision of a new democratic society in which an elected council would replace the chiefs and their elders” (p. 77).

He perceived the youth as a quintessential tool in the Gold Coast nationalism movement. When Nkrumah and compatriots were imprisoned for weeks after the 1948 riots, students and teachers embarked on demonstrations all over the country. In fortifying his relationship with the youth, Nkrumah formally established the Committee on Youth Action (CYO) in 1949 which he employed to pursue the radical agenda of “Self Government Now” (Rooney, 2007, pp. 67-70). The youth group after the formation of the CPP in June that year was to become an effective arm of Nkrumah’s party in Nkrumah’s pursuit towards Ghana’s independence. By acknowledging the youth, Nkrumah had imprinted their name in history and had given the youth their due in the entire struggle for the independence of the Gold Coast. He had, therefore, noted through rhetoric their unique sacrifices which had led to the nation’s independence. Nkrumah used the speech as an opportunity to renew his solidarity contract with the youth group and this solidarity will continue even after independence.

Aside the youth group, Nkrumah mentioned “the farmers ... who have so nobly fought and won this battle” in the Declaration. Before the 1951 general elections in the Gold Coast, Nkrumah had taken great political advantage of the cocoa farmers’ disaffection with the British colonial policy of cutting down swollen shoot infected cocoa trees.

This situation had drawn the massive support of the farmers towards him during the 1951 elections (Rathbone, 2000). Thus, Nkrumah literally stood on the shoulders of the cocoa farmers to come into political office. However, in the year 1954, the fall of the world cocoa price affected Nkrumah government's cocoa pricing policy. Therefore, the political advantage which Nkrumah took regarding the cocoa crises in 1951, would come back to haunt him. The love of the farmers for Nkrumah ironically turned into a bitter disaffection.

This economic situation partly led to the establishment of the opposition party, National Liberation Movement (Rooney, 2007), which took political advantage of the 1954 cocoa crises, just as Nkrumah had done in 1951. Politically, the National Liberation Movement was going to taunt Nkrumah's government throughout the years before and after Ghana's independence (Rooney, 2007). So in declaring the nation's independence, Nkrumah again used the speech to give recognition to cocoa farmers, whose disaffection with him (Nkrumah) had naturally provided a strong support base for the opposition NLM. In the address, Nkrumah was attempting to renew his relationship with the farmers by re-identifying himself with the fundamental course of independence that drew them towards his own course six years earlier. The recognition was a means of reminding the farmers of the noble deeds they (Nkrumah and farmers) fought for which had finally yielded the fruits of independence.

Another key group in the independence struggle had been "the women." An important group whose support Nkrumah still needed to court even after the nation's independence. Remembering the role of women in the independence movement in Ghana partly reveals crucial sections of Gold Coast nationalism. Nkrumah used to highlight the historic contribution of women in the Convention Peoples' Party during the struggle for independence. It invoked indirectly some political performances of women which should not be lost in Ghanaian political and public memory.

Women had formed a great support to Nkrumah during the turbulent days of the independence struggle. After the 1948 Riots, Nkrumah, fearing immediate arrest, had gone into hiding with two women supporters in Accra (Rooney, 2007). This revealed the challenges women had to endure alongside the men, in keeping alive the flame of nationalism within the colony. Again, women demonstrated charisma and leadership in the CPP. Such records are vivid in the annals of the party. The hymn 'Lead Kindly Light', which was sung at Convention Peoples' Party rallies, was adopted by the party after a woman at a United Gold Coast Convention rally in 1949 burst into singing upon Nkrumah's announcement of his resignation from the United Gold Coast Convention (Rooney, 2007). Milne (2000) provides an emotional account of a Convention Peoples' Party woman, who at a Party rally "got on the platform and ended a fiery speech by slashing her face with a razor blade. Smearing blood all over her body she challenged men to be prepared to shed blood in the cause of independence" (p. 60). According to Rooney (2007), during the early beginnings of the CPP, "women flocked the charismatic new leader, and were effectively used to organize branches in every community (p. 77). Four women, namely, Mrs. Letitia Quaye, Mrs. Hannah Cudjoe, Madam Ama Nkrumah and Madam Sophia Doku (Milne, 2000) were appointed in the Party as Propaganda Secretaries who travelled countrywide campaigning for the Convention Peoples' Party.



Women had been a fortress for Nkrumah and had responded to his call to free the nation from colonial rule. As Nkrumah acknowledged the women, he sought to solicit their continuous support in the coming years to come. He used the speech to endear himself and his new government to the womenfolk who had been a political bastion not only for the Convention Peoples' Party but also from the transition of a colony into freedom.

The last group to be selected for praise in Nkrumah's address was the ex-service men. They might have seemed the most important for being singled out in a different sentence for special emphasis. Nkrumah continued: "Also, I want to thank the valiant ex-service men who have so cooperated with me in this mighty task of freeing our country from foreign rule and imperialism."

The reference to "valiant ex-servicemen" only reveals Nkrumah's attempt in appealing to what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) refer to as symbolic relation. They explain that "the symbolic connection brings about transferences between the symbol and the thing symbolized" (p. 332). Warnick (1996) also refers to it as symbolic liaison and argues that it is "a whole universe of experience shared by the rhetor and audience upon which the rhetor can draw to gain acceptance of his or her position" (p. 190). In this instance, the symbolic relation Nkrumah invoked is a shared memory of the audience of the singular most heroic deed in Gold Coast nationalism which saw the loss of the lives of three brave ex-service men, leading to the 1948 Riots (Rooney, 2007). The valiant action of the ex-service men has become a watershed in Gold Coast's nationalism. It was on the heels of this famous riot that sustained effort against imperialism in the Gold Coast began. The mention of "ex-service men" is evocative of the many painful stories and the difficult sacrifices ordinary brave men and women had to endure in order to challenge colonial rule. In a sense, it invokes an intense pathos in the audience and creates a sense of "communion" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 332) between Nkrumah and the audience.

In another sense, the evocation of the "ex-servicemen" reveals the level of cooperation which prior to independence existed between Nkrumah and these retired soldiers. Perhaps, this "cooperation" brings to the fore Nkrumah's influence on the veterans at a meeting on the 20th February 1948 (Rooney, 2007) which might have defined the nature of that fateful protest which shook the foundation of the colonial power in the Gold Coast. It is important to state that the effect of the 28th February Riots did not only spark nationalism within the borders of the Gold Coast but also created a rippling effect all over Africa. With Nkrumah's continental vision, the Independence Declaration speech provided a clear opportunity to lay his claim as an architect of the fateful 28th February riots. From a rhetorical point of view, through "cooperation" with "the valiant ex-service men," Nkrumah had engineered in 1947, arguably, one of the most important acts of Gold Coast nationalism and was declaring the Gold Coast's independence in the period marking almost a decade after the Riots.

Beyond using the speech to establish the needed solidarity with different constituencies within the audience, Nkrumah further employed the speech in articulating a clear Pan-African view. In the next section, I attempt to examine this key strategy in Nkrumah's address.

## The Pan-African Agenda

In the second part of the address, the speech sharply moves from Ghana's independence to focus on Pan-Africanism which would be at the centre of Nkrumah's foreign policy at independence. On 6th March 1957, when Nkrumah was proclaiming Ghana's independence, there were only eight independent African nations. These were Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Liberia and South Africa. Nkrumah's audience was, therefore, not limited to those at the Polo Grounds that night. Outside Ghana, the speech was reported to an extended international audience through radio broadcast. But Nkrumah's speech targeted and attracted two key groups of extended audiences. The first group was the millions of Africans living under colonial rule in Africa; the second group involved western countries with colonial holdings in Africa. Nkrumah had targeted the speech to have a perlocutionary effect on both groups of the extended audience.

For the first group of audience (Africans), they were simply in dire need of continuous hope and inspiration to fight their own colonial battles in their respective African territories. Since nationalism activities were gathering momentum in different part of the continent, the situation in Africa obviously presented an exigency for Nkrumah in his Declaration address. As a result, many African countries looked to Nkrumah to provide direction and inspiration to free their territories from colonial rule. The second group, the colonialists, especially the British and French governments, were wary as to the possible implications Ghana's independence meant for their other colonies in Africa. Though most independence celebrations are characterized by epideictic orations, Nkrumah used the speech to address this key Pan-African exigency in the light of Ghana's foreign policy. Nkrumah noted:

We are not waiting, we shall no more go back to sleep anymore. Today, from now on there is a new African in the world, that new African is ready to fight his own battle and show that after all, the Black man is capable of managing his own affairs. We are going to demonstrate to the world and to the other nations, young as we are that we are prepared to lay our own foundations... I made a point that we are going to see that we create our own African personality and identity.

This statement provided a hint of Nkrumah's Pan-African ideology. The statement clearly invoked a firm view which had been highlighted by the participants of the 5th Pan-African Congress in Manchester (Padmore, 1963). This idea had been articulated more clearly by Padmore (1953) in his work, *The Gold Coast Revolution*, four years before Ghana's independence as he witnessed progressive political developments within the Gold Coast. He argued:

For too long have Africans slept. But now they are awakening-and rapidly-to the realization of their inferior status, to a consciousness of their rights in the world of men and nations. And having awakened, they will not again fall back asleep. They will fight – and by every means, as recent events have only too well demonstrated – to secure their rightful heritage as free people in a free word.

By re-invoking the words of Padmore (1953), Nkrumah had brought about their fulfilment as he declared Ghana's independence. At the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester, Padmore played a pioneering role alongside W.E.B. Du Bois. Nkrumah had worked with Padmore so closely and Padmore was going to be a great influence on Nkrumah's nationalism and Pan-African ideas in the years of struggle prior to 6th March 1957. Padmore's contribution and organisational abilities at Manchester had been extraordinary. Du Bois, in recounting events at Manchester, referred to Padmore as "the organizing spirit of that congress" (Padmore, 1963). By referring to Padmore, Nkrumah did not only stand on the authority of a revered Pan-Africanist, but was transferring values and reinterpreting Padmore's words in the light of a new context (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). First, Ghana's independence was seen as the first in its kind in Africa south of the Sahara. Secondly, it was a reminder or a call of Nkrumah's remote audience in Africa of the need to fulfil the Pan-African dream in their territories.

With Padmore's words, Nkrumah was promising citizens of the new nation the creation of "our own African personality" which is a response to Padmore's quest for a "rightful heritage." Nkrumah had symbolically become a representation of the "new African" with all the positive attributes that will inspire Ghanaians and the rest of Africa. The call for the creation of an "African personality" was a call to Ghanaians and the rest of Africa to develop self-pride and re-embrace African heritage and values. It was a demonstration of pride in the African self as a unique personality capable of making notable contribution in the modern world.

Twelve years earlier at the Manchester Congress, a fairly good number of African liberation fighters were present. This was unprecedented in the history of the Congress (Padmore, 1963). Notable among them were Obafemi Awolowo and Jaja Wachuku of Nigeria, Wallace-Johnson of Sierra Leone, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Peter Abrahams and Mark Hlubi of the Union of South Africa and Dr. Hastings Banda of Nyasaland. They had embraced the resolutions at the Congress and left Manchester as agents of political change in Africa. As he brought back vivid memories of the Manchester Congress, Nkrumah at this point, directed the speech's focus unto the remote African audience. He brought the speech to its highest point when he made a call which was at the heart of his Pan-African agenda. He stated:

We have done the battle and we again rededicate ourselves not only in the struggle to emancipate other territories in Africa. Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with total liberation of the African continent.

Nkrumah appealed to the argument of the parts and the whole (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that "the whole is treated as similar to each one of its parts ... what is true of the whole is true of the part" (p. 231). The underlying argument is that if Africa is not free [the whole] then the freedom of its part [Ghana] remains inconclusive. The speech provides a forceful voice in articulating an African policy regarding the future of the continent in relation to imperialism.

The only way to ensure proper economic emancipation and political freedom for any country is to ensure the total freedom of Africa. It was a clear announcement that Ghana's independence, though a good sign, was not a complete achievement within the context of the "whole." It, therefore, becomes a part and probably the beginning of a larger fight for the total emancipation of Africa. Whilst it served as an implicit threat to imperialism on the continent, it provided as a direct source of encouragement and hope to all African people still looking out for a ray of hope to bring about their ultimate salvation from colonial servitude. It was a faithful promise by Nkrumah to the remote African audience. In other words, Nkrumah wanted to create a rhetorical agency that will be relevant and effective in Africa beyond the primary exigency which summoned the speech into being.

On the platform of Ghana's independence, he had made a loud and urgent call to the rest of African people to wake up and free Africa to become whole. It was in the larger interest or purpose of Africa's liberation that Ghana's independence was fought for. Though Gold Coasters had been freshly liberated from colonialism, in a metaphorical sense, they were being conscripted into the duty of a continental liberation movement. This, for Nkrumah, could not be a matter for negotiation. Nkrumah had, therefore, constituted the remote African audience into a rhetorical audience. Farrell (1993) argues: the potential of rhetoric is best realised through a prescribed form of engagement with an audience as an agency of art ... it is the rhetorical audience (the "one who decides") that functions as the efficient cause of the enactment of rhetoric as practical art (p. 68).

The speech had certainly set a new urgency in motion in Africa. For the Western audience, especially the British and other countries with colonial holdings in Africa, Nkrumah's declaration represented an implicit warning to them. It meant that the success of Ghana's struggle was going to be replicated in the other African colonial territories to bring about their freedom. It revealed a sign of a haunting urgency as Nkrumah called on the new citizens to "rededicate ourselves... in the struggle to emancipate other territories in Africa." Such a call has the rhetorical potential of weakening the moral defence of colonial governments against Nkrumah's urgent quest for independence all over in Africa. His statement sounded the strong resolve and possibly imminent collapse of the formidable walls of imperialism in Africa. What then was the source of strength for this resolution? Nkrumah's speech applied what Pierard and Linder (1988) refer to as civil religion which the next section examines.

## **Civil Religion**

Since the beginning of Nkrumah's involvement in the struggles for independence in the Gold Coast, Nkrumah in a rhetorical posture had cast the whole struggle for independence within a civil religious practice. He had, therefore, employed the Christian religion as a counter hegemonic tool against colonialism (Simms, 2006). This practice of employing religion was not going to be a one-time activity but a permanent rhetorical feature throughout the period of almost two decades when Nkrumah was Prime Minister and later President of Ghana. The choice of such a peculiar rhetorical trademark could not have been an accident but a purposeful choice to achieve a particular end.

To engage in a meaningful discussion, it is important to have a brief sketch of Christian religion and politics in the Gold Coast till the time of the nation's independence. Religion seems to be, as Pobe (1991) asserts, "one of the important institutional structures making up the total social system" (p. 11). Pobe continues to note that:

in most of the communal activities and other social institutions of African peoples are inextricably bound up with religion and all the spirit-world. Birth, puberty, marriage, death, widowhood, harvest and installations to traditional offices all partake of a religious nature. Political life itself is laced with religion (p. 11).

By 1957, the Christian religion had been well institutionalised in the major cities and towns in the Gold Coast, if not in the hinterlands. Most of the African educated elites have embraced Christian values as a result of their education in missionary schools which were supported by the Gold Coast Colonial administration. The general populace who although may not have necessarily embraced Christian religion had come to associate with it respect and superiority compared to their own traditional religious practices which the missionaries had tagged as heathen and uncivilized. For the new African political elite like Nkrumah, countering colonialism called for speaking in the religious language of the colonizer and indulging in religious symbolism which represented for the masses the source of power and authority of the white colonizer. Though he confessed not being fond of organized religion (Rooney, 2007), Nkrumah constantly sustained and reinforced that symbolic image of Christian religious power through his rhetorical invention even after Ghana's independence (Monfils, 1977). In some ways, it reveals Nkrumah's level of commitment to sustain a high level of rhetorical engagement with the ordinary people in the Gold Coast struggle for independence.

Since the main purpose of the rhetor, in the view of Perelman (1979), is to ensure "a meeting of minds" (p. 11) with his audience, Nkrumah tried to identify with the people of the Gold Coast through his application of Christian images. Indeed, Gold Coasters fundamentally interpreted life through their religious inclination. When Nkrumah laid a proposal for Gold Coast independence in the Gold Coast Colonial Assembly in 1953, he had spoken metaphorically in a prophetic tone like Moses who had appeared before Pharaoh to demand for the freedom of the people of Israel. He had chronicled in the 1953 speech the forebears of Gold Coast nationalism who could not reach the promise land of Ghana's independence.

As Nkrumah declared Ghana's independence on the 6th of March 1957, he continued what he had begun five years earlier by acknowledging the providence of God in the entire struggle of the people of the Gold Coast. He noted: "but today, may I call upon you all that at this great day, let us all remember that nothing in the world can be done unless it had the purported support of God." The speech's continuation of civil religion renders it rhetorically poignant. Nkrumah had symbolically led the people into the promise land of freedom. He had interpreted before the new citizens the success of independence as an act of God's providence which has yielded the fruits of freedom to God's people.

In a sense, he reconstituted the Polo grounds into a hallowed place, a place where the freedom of the nation had been declared. Thus, through God's providence, the people had experienced a renewal of self within the politico-religious ceremony which Nkrumah had performed. The people had been called to worship and the mundane public meeting of citizens had been, for a moment, transformed into a religious ceremony of thanksgiving. Through words, the audience had been "performed" as citizens of a new nation, inspired for Pan-Africanism and had been turned to worship God for his providence. The different transitions which the audience are conducted through Nkrumah's words are rhetorically effective and striking. He had called on them to pray and reflect for a moment:

Fellow Ghanaians, let us now ask for God's blessing and for only two seconds, in your thousands and millions I want to ask you to pause for only for one minute and give thanks to Almighty God for having led us through obstacles, difficulties, imprisonments, hardships and sufferings to have brought us to the end of our troubles today. One minute silence.

Nkrumah called for a minute silence and the audience responded accordingly. Such a moment of reflection becomes heavy-laden with emotions as the audience are made to go through a quick kaleidoscope of the different phases of the long struggle to freedom. Nkrumah had identified himself with the audience and had joined with them so that together they could experience remembrance. To Aristotle (2007), "[there is persuasion] through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion by the speech" (p. 39). As Nkrumah spoke about the "difficulties, imprisonment hardships and suffering," he stood on the dais together with his comrades wearing caps with the inscription PG – (meaning Prison Graduates). Just as Powell (1984) clearly puts it, it was "a reminder of what they had suffered to get where they were that day" (p. 108). Nkrumah had, therefore, physically and symbolically become an embodiment of the entire struggle which the people of the Gold Coast had had to experience. The inscription "PG" on their caps had provided them a unique place in the minds of the audience. Nkrumah as well as his colleagues had earned what Aristotle (2007) refers to as "good will" (p. 112) from the people and were deemed honourable. In talking about honor, Aristotle (2007) points to acts "that bring honor rather than money; and whatever someone has done not for his own sake; and things absolutely good and whatever someone has done for his own country, overlooking his own interest" (pp. 77-78). Nkrumah succeeded in pointing to his honourable deeds to the audience. Thus, as he called unto the audience for a thanksgiving prayer to God, he had indirectly also focused the audience's attention to his ethos. Together with the people, Nkrumah had celebrated the providence of God and had ended the civil religious ritual with a call for the playing of the new national anthem. As the anthem was being played whilst Nkrumah remained quiet, there was an emotional outburst among the audience. Powell (1984), Nkrumah's British secretary, in her own vivid accounts notes: as the national anthem was played over and over again, sobs could be heard and hands wiped tears from eyes. The mood was now sober, as if they suddenly realised that this child they had helped give birth to was going to be no small burden to bear (p. 108).

Nkrumah ended his address with a call and response act with the audience. He shouted “freedom”, which the crowd responded by repeating freedom. In the end, the energies of the orator and the audience were infused together. Together, Nkrumah with the people had pronounced the independence of the nation by declaring it publicly, thus bringing to an end not only the civil religious ceremony but more importantly, bringing into being a new nation and her citizens.

## **Impact of the Address**

The declaration of independence to a people who have had been under colonial rule for an extensive period will be undeniably received with great excitement and jubilation. Such was the reception of Nkrumah’s Independence Declaration speech. Any critical assessment of the speech’s impact on the immediate audience cannot ignore the role of symbolism in determining the rhetorical effectiveness of Nkrumah’s invention. Nkrumah successfully employed the new national symbols of naming, flag and anthem to create a sense of nationhood which was non-existent prior to the 6th of March. Through symbolism, Nkrumah had set a new psychological paradigm as a conscious means of weaning Ghanaian citizens from perceiving their place within the new independent community through British colonial images. By forcefully bringing these symbols to the attention of the new citizens through the speech, Nkrumah had not only “create[d] the desired emotions” (Perelman, 1982, p. 37) in them but had also established a presence in the minds of the audience thereby “prevent[ing] them [national symbols] from being neglected” (Perelman, 1982, p. 35).

A few months after independence in 1957, Nkrumah had replaced the effigy of the Queen of England with his own on both the Ghanaian postage stamps and currencies (Fuller, 2008). The justification which he had provided for this action underscored his conscious use of symbolism. In an open letter to the Queen, Nkrumah (1957) had asserted that “many of my people cannot read or write. They’ve got to be shown that they are now really independent. And they can only be shown by signs” (p. 12). In fact, what Barbara Monfils (1977) refers to as Nkrumah’s employment of “Operation Psychology” (p. 313) soon after Ghana’s independence, had rather begun at the Polo Grounds on the 6th of March. The practice was going to be sustained throughout Nkrumah’s time as president of Ghana. Thus, at the Independence Declaration, the people did not just witness an end to colonial rule but the speech had generated a new sense of identity and pride for the Ghanaian citizen through Nkrumah’s employment of symbolism.

With regard to Nkrumah’s long battle with the chiefs who had been the main supporting force behind the opposition National Liberation Movement, Nkrumah had used the speech as a means of restoring the power of the chiefs who prior to 1951 had enjoyed political power and the cooperation of the colonial government. Through the 6th of March speech, Nkrumah had made a call to unite with the chiefs to develop the new nation. This had been a positive sign to the British government which had been accused of courting the NLM to delay independence. The address portrayed a picture of a leader who was ready to unite his entire citizenry in order to pursue a national cause.

However, Nkrumah's assurance and goodwill to the chiefs was never going to see the light of day after independence. Later events had revealed that the rhetoric of unity and restoration during the 6th of March speech was only a façade (Rooney, 2007) as Nkrumah had only sought to increase his credibility taking advantage of the media spotlight which is usually thrown on such national occasions. Nkrumah's deviation from his promises to the chiefs would deepen the antagonism towards his government till his overthrow nine years later after declaring Ghana's independence. With hindsight, the U- turn which Nkrumah took after his speech represents a low point regarding the long-term impact of his Independence Declaration speech. But within the short term, the speech achieved immediate success as a gesture of unity on the birth of a new nation.

Undoubtedly, the speech had a positive impact on Pan-Africanism. In 1960, three years after the Independence Declaration speech, as many as seventeen countries in Africa attained their independence. Whilst it will be an over stretch to claim that Nkrumah's 1957 speech at independence resulted in this huge success, it could be argued that the speech's strong Pan-African emphasis, no doubt, contributed to this African success story. The independence address laid a firm foundation for Nkrumah's Pan-African agenda. An example was the formation of the Ghana-Guinea Union and the organisation of the All-African People's Conference in 1958 (Rooney, 2007), which is considered among Nkrumah's greatest diplomatic success. Beyond Africa, Nkrumah's Independence speech had had positive effect as far as in the West Indies. Leaders in the West Indies like Norman Manley, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, began fighting for the attainment of full sovereignty for the West Indies Federation (Rooney, 2007). In the United States, Ghana's independence, Rooney (2007) argues, "created an excitement and a momentum which merged with the civil rights struggles of the ensuing decade" (p. 206).

## Conclusion

All in all, it could be concluded that Nkrumah's Independence Declaration was largely a successful one in view of its far reaching impact. As a key oratorical invention, the speech arguably was a strong attempt in initiating a new sense of Ghanaian citizenship and the belief in the African self – a sense of self recognition and citizenship needed for the building of a new nation. Through the use of symbolism, Nkrumah replaced British colonial images which had for generations become a part of the consciousness of Gold Coasters with images of the new nation. So far as Nkrumah's Pan-African agenda is concerned, the speech served as a launching pad for Nkrumah's foreign policy. After 1957, Nkrumah's oration and activities within Africa and beyond would be premised on the foundation which he had laid in the 6th of March address. Through the address, Nkrumah had performed the nation through a civil religious ceremony upon which he established himself as a high priest ready to lead and guide his people in the course of God's providence. Though the independence speech of a small nation in Africa south of the Sahara, it marked the beginning of Nkrumah's formal oratorical establishment as a true Pan-Africanist. Through the address, Nkrumah's voice emerged as a notable voice amongst many in the fight to free Africa from colonialism. Thus, through his rhetoric, Nkrumah had given a hint of his African liberation agenda on the platform of Ghana's independence celebration. This statement, obviously, showed the future trajectory of Nkrumah's political focus.



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