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Influencing British Colonial Policy – Expatriate Euro-Africans and the Gold Coast Press in the Change of the 20th Century
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Wednesday 4 April 2018 16.30 - 18.30

H-4 - WOR04 : Extensions of the State and Cultural Encounters in Africa, Asia and Europe from the 17th to the 20th Century

MST/03/004 Main Site Tower

Network: World History	Chairs: -
Organizer: Otso Kortekangas	Discussant: Lisa Hellman

Patrik Hettula, PhD student, Åbo Akademi University

Influencing British colonial policy – Eurafrikan sojourns and the Gold Coast press in the change of the 20th century

Introduction

The British colonized the Gold Coast gradually in a prolonged process during the nineteenth century. The coast became a formal colony in 1874, after having been a protectorate for most of the century. The Ashanti kingdom, adjacent to the coast, remained independent until king Prempeh I was dethroned in 1896 and the land annexed to the colony. The Northern Territories became a protectorate in 1900, giving the colony the approximate size and borders of today's Ghana.¹ The social makeup in this colonial setting was highly diverse and the efforts and effects of the colonial rule actively contested. The British struggled with the colony's transition from slavery to an economy based on cash crop production. Their ambivalence towards the development of the colony was attested by the minuscule investments that were made in the country. In 1957, the newly independent Ghana celebrated its inauguration by sending off the last British governor. Many supporters of the British Empire saw this as a major failure and setback.

The discussion in this paper will not ponder on how and why the Gold Coast failed as a British colony, but rather on how and why native Gold Coasters became a politically aware and active proponent in the opposition against colonial legislations and the expansion in the colony. I trace this process to the

¹ Rhoda Howard, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Ghana* (Croom Helm Ltd: London 1978), p. 30–34.

persons in the Gold Coast native elite, who practically enjoyed the privileges and freedoms of high society in Britain. Peculiar to this small group was that a majority of them stemmed from an ethnically mixed Euro-African descent. In many cases their European ancestor had been a European merchant who had visited or migrated to the Gold Coast a few generations earlier and taken a local wife from the coastal community. Eurafricans, who were descendants to these interracial relations, usually also inherited the trade and wealth of the merchant families. Their children were educated and privileged inhabitants in urbanized spaces on the Gold Coast. They orientated themselves in between, on the one hand African and on the other hand European, spaces.

In the long course of the British presence and increasing colonial rule, the relations between the British and the Eurafricans changed from friendly or ambivalent in the middle of the nineteenth century to suspicious and hostile in the early twentieth century. I want to acknowledge in advance that the Eurafrican community was far from homogenous. The political discussions between Eurafricans coloured the palette of different views and beliefs regarding the present state of the colony as well as the future that it was headed towards.

In the centre of my argument on why Eurafricans became early opponents and critics of the colonial government is the freedom and mobility they enjoyed to travel and visit the British Empire and its metropolitan cities. These experiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century made them aware of racism, colonial subjugation as well as alternative political debates and activism on a global scale. This paper traces Eurafrican cross-continental travels and depicts their sojourns abroad as well as their active participation in the organized opposition towards colonial legislation and expanding British rule on the Gold Coast. At the end of this paper, I will also extend a more general discussion over the Gold Coast press and how it evolved into a public space. The timeframe, or what I would rather call temporal and spatial cross-sections, focuses on observations ranging from the 1890s to the 1930s.

Samuel R. B. Solomon, minister and newspaperman

Samuel Solomon, later known as Attoh Ahuma, travelled from Cape Coast to England, and then back to Africa to Axim, Accra and Nigeria. He then returned again to England and also studied in the USA, all in the short span of two years between 1898 and 1900. After that there is very little known about his whereabouts and dealings in Britain until 1904.² As in the case of Casely Hayford (discussed further below on page 9), plenty of hints and pieces of Solomon's life are offered in his own literary work "Memoirs of West African Celebrities" (1905) from that period of time.³ What his tours in Europe and elsewhere entailed for him was the possibility to further the prospects of his future career as a journalist. However, his travels were also prompted by difficulties back home. Solomon had been forced to resign as a minister at the Methodist Church after being very vocal about his nationalist ideas in the press.⁴ Therefore, his ambition was to defend the continued role of Eurafricans as ministers in mission work.⁵

Already in 1886, Ahuma, then known as Samuel Solomon, travelled to London to study at the Richmond College, which was affiliated with the Wesleyan Mission. From his experiences survived a four-part report that was published in the Gold Coast Leader in 1905 under the title "The College Correspondence of Samuel"⁶. It is a very interesting depiction of his travels from the Gold Coast to England and his experiences as a student there. According to Ray Jenkins, some thirty Gold Coast students studied in Britain between the 1880's and the end of the century, Solomon being one of them.⁷ The first two articles dealt with Solomon's voyage from Cape Coast to England, describing colonies and countries he visited along the way. The journey in itself and the meetings Samuel had with persons of status in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Gambia acted as nodes in his important

² Raymond Jenkins, *Gold Coast historians and their pursuit of the Gold Coast pasts: 1882-1917* (University of Birmingham: Birmingham 1985, unpublished doctoral thesis), p. 501.

³ Jenkins, *Gold Coast historians* (1985), p. 502.

⁴ Deviating to much from the opinions of the synod in the Wesleyan church put him under a spotlight that damaged his reputation and career. He decided to voluntarily resign from the church.

⁵ Raymond Jenkins, *Gold Coast historians* (1985), pp. 496-501.

⁶ See the Gold Coast Leader issues: August 19, September 2, September 16, September 23, 1905 for the full report.

⁷ Raymond Jenkins, 'Gold Coast, 1880-1919: With Specific Reference to Their Activities in Britain,' in *Immigrants and Minorities* 4, no. 3 (1985), pp. 46-47.

journey, as well as in the making of a young educated Gold Coast man. For instance, his meeting with the renowned Edward Blyden in Sierra Leone was given a very detailed description and also signalled some of Samuel's political standings and opinions on race and progress in West Africa.⁸

Christian missionaries, among others, had long used the civilizing mission as a moral justification for their undertakings in Africa. The success of the mission had led Europeanized or Anglicized coastal communities on the Gold Coast to think highly of Britain and to adopt their Victorian ideals. Individuals in these coastal societies were judged on how well they performed as civilized gentlemen or ladies. However, Christianity and civilization alone did not contribute to the rise of the Victorian Eurafrican. Perhaps more crucial was the role that commerce played in Gold Coast society. As Roger Gocking has argued, the ever more complex capitalist system that emerged in nineteenth-century Africa required more specialized and better educated workers. A differentiated class-consciousness emerged among the Eurafricans based not only on wealth but also on education.⁹ From this perspective we can start to understand how Solomon had perceived Britain and why he was genuinely disappointed upon arrival.

In one of the articles, Solomon described how he had imagined the English shoreline and the houses that would greet him as he drew closer: "I waited patiently for the entrancing vision of pearly brightness I had conjured in my own mind"¹⁰. He was however very disappointed when it dawned upon him that the shoreline was nothing he had imagined and that the houses were bleak and dull. He and his African peers were greeted by insults by passers-by shouting things like "Blackie", "Blackamoor", "Black Nigger" and "Pudding face". Apparently surprised by these events, Samuel reasoned that it was the lack of or inefficiency of proper schools and education that had led to this "human depravity".

⁸ Gold Coast Leader 19.8.1905.

⁹ Roger Gocking, *Facing Two Ways* (University Press of America: Boston, 1999), pp. 58-59.

¹⁰ Gold Coast Leader 16.9.1905.

However, it supports the assertion by Douglas Lorimer that hostility towards black residents at this time period had become a concern.¹¹

Solomon wrote: "Coming to England is certainly not all beer and skittles. This unexpected reception made us sigh for the leeks and the onions of Egypt." We can imagine that for Samuel this first encounter with Britain lowered his expectations of Englishmen and Englishwomen in general.

Gold Coasters, such as Samuel, had mostly come in contact with well-educated Europeans with a high social position, especially the men employed by the Government. The Anglicized Eurafricans generally perceived white men as educated model citizens, with the exception of some white seamen and labourers they came across who did not fit the picture. However, it was typically during sojourns in England that Eurafricans first came in contact with common Englishmen and Englishwomen.¹² These were white people who did not suit the picture of the gentry that the Africans were accustomed to. Maybe it was this realization that made Eurafricans question racial attitudes, which they had been brought up to believe and accept. It was not uncommon that articles in the Gold Coast press would contest a racial supposition when it emerged, but nonetheless from the mid-nineteenth century, racially based currents of ideas were spreading and also influencing the work of African thinkers. Edward Blyden, for instance, stipulated his opinions regarding race. They were influenced by contemporary science that aimed at placing black people as the lowest in a hierarchy of races. Blyden did not support the idea of race hierarchies, but however did state and maintain an unpopular opinion that mulattos (read: Eurafricans) did not qualify as 'Negros'. He had come to this conclusion after his personal involvement in Liberia's conflicts between blacks and mulattos, as well

¹¹ Douglas A. Lorimer, *Science, Race Relations and Resistance: Britain, 1870-1914* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2015), p. XX

¹² Gold Coasters who read British newspapers and magazines ought to have been familiar with the different scenes and characters that one might have encountered on the streets of Victorian London. Papers frequently contained articles and satirical cartoons with generalized pictures of the London "types". These generally depicted a divide in society, where, on the one side, there were the well-dressed and snobbish, and, on the other side, the poor and shabby. Peter K. Andersson, *Streetlife in Late Victorian London: The Constable and the Crowd* (Dissertation at Lund University: Lund 2012) p. 192.

as based on his experiences of mulattos who acted superior to the black population in the United States.¹³ Authors on race, such as Blyden, presented different theories during the late nineteenth century that gained wide attention. Lorimer suggests, however, that we have to remain sceptical to any claim that a single author represented a larger body of opinion. Scientific racism emerged in the 1920s, but from 1870 to 1914 “race was a contested territory”.¹⁴

Continuing on his correspondence, Samuel described the miraculous sensation of riding a train across the English countryside. The marvel of the modern technology seems also to have been a common theme in other journey-stories. Besides being in the company of his colleague and fellow student Thomas Penny, Samuel was also assisted and attended to throughout the journey by English patrons, whose presence must have had a positive effect on the young student and must have helped him overcome his unfortunate experiences with the locals.

In the last letter, Samuel recounted his time as a freshman at the Richmond College. He seemed very well adjusted in London and talked very highly of the education at the institute he was attending. Samuel was probably not an exception as a black student who thrived in an English college, but he was also not disillusioned to think that England would welcome him wholeheartedly if he decided to stay.

Later in life when Samuel Solomon was crossing the Atlantic on his way to the USA he was faced with racial prejudice on-board the ship he was travelling on. In an obituary issue in the Gold Coast Leader in 1922 following Solomon’s death, Reverend James Reynolds recalled the incident on the ship:

The atmosphere was hostile with negrophobies underneath; but notwithstanding this he encouraged himself by preaching on board a sermon which held the audience spell-bound and to suit the occasion he styled the sermon ‘All’s Well.’¹⁵

¹³ Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot 1832-1912* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 1970), p. 58–60.

¹⁴ Lorimer (2015), p. XX

¹⁵ Gold Coast Leader 28.1.1922.

Soon after, as a result of the unpleasant experiences on-board the ship, he started to use the name Attoh Ahuma. Isaac Ephson, who popularized many Gold Coast persons in his writings, offers us his own explanation, stating that one of the passengers on-board criticized him for his Anglo-Saxon name Samuel Solomon. Consequently “He immediately changed it to Attoh-Ahuma, and never regretted the change”.¹⁶ Name reforms were, however, not unusual and were both political and cultural statements in favour of the Africanizing trends that emerged in the West African scene towards the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

The four-part reports in the *Gold Coast Leader* should be seen as a testament to the character of Attoh Ahuma in the early 1900s. They reflected the thoughts and actions Ahuma saw necessary for the future development of the country. In the tug between Anglicization and Africanization, he contrasted his experiences in Britain twenty years earlier to the hardships and struggles of early twentieth century colonized peoples. British indirect rule and new legislations trying to regulate access to land had been met with great opposition. Nevertheless, Eurafrican sentiments towards the British were far from uniform. Condemned as deluded, some Eurafricans believed that by collaborating with the government, there could be beneficial concession for both the government and the natives. However, the disillusioned opposition was convinced that without vigilant supervision over government actions British officials would continuously encroach on rights and freedoms of the natives. There was an overwhelming conviction that the government would abuse any concessions by Africans.

In 1894, Solomon took over the editorship of the *Gold Coast Methodist Times* and held the position until 1897. From January 1898 to June 1909 he also managed the *Gold Coast Aborigines*, a weekly paper in Cape Coast. He was a founder of the *Gold Coast Leader* that operated between 1902 and 1934. During his time at the *Methodist Times*, the colonial government was actively trying to enact a Lands Bill that would strip the native chiefs control over their lands. Rhoda Howard has argued that the reasons behind this attempted bill were, on

¹⁶ Isaac Ephson, *Gallery of Gold Coast Celebrities 1632–1958* (Accra 1969), p. 77.

¹⁷ Gocking (1999), p. 73.

the one hand, the government's eagerness to establish cash crops with foreign labour and, on the other hand, to gain control over gold production.¹⁸ A gold rush occurred during the 1890s that saw a large number of foreign prospectors being granted land concessions by local chiefs. Arguably the government was horrified by some of the largest concessions made to Europeans and wanted to regulate the practice. However, distrusting the motives of the British and believing the true reasons being the government's business concerns, a delegation consisting of members from the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) presented a petition to the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain in London.¹⁹ They argued that the British had no paramount title to land in the Gold Coast Colony, since the colony had been obtained by cession instead of conquest.²⁰ Chamberlain eventually dropped the Bill. This granted the opposition their first big victory against the government. Undoubtedly, there were other reasons besides the petition that contributed to Chamberlain's decision, such as the political unrest in Sierra Leone and the brewing war in South Africa. These occurrences and the general unrest in Africa could have easily amassed into undesirable situations on the Gold Coast, driving away foreign merchants and investors.

During this period Gold Coast newspapers, such as the *Methodist Times*, were very vocal against the Lands Bill and the colonial government. The papers gained publicity and became increasingly important as political mouthpieces for editors and columnists. Solomon was known to make bold statements in his editorials and became a local celebrity because of that. A testament to his critique as an editor can be viewed in the issue of the *Methodist Times* published on July 31 1897 where he strongly advised his peers to study English law and educate themselves. There had also been rumours concerning a new legislation restricting and censoring the papers, to which Solomon answered condemningly:

The indefeasible right of publicly dissecting and discussing political subjects is one of the distinctive and essential features of the constitutional Government of England. No one who has the most

¹⁸ Howard (1978), p. 39.

¹⁹ Howard (1978), p. 41.

²⁰ David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana, 1850-1928* (The Clarendon Press: Oxford 1965), p. 388.

elementary knowledge of the Constitution of England will dare to affect crass ignorance on this vital point [...]

He continued by defending his right to scrutinize and criticize whomever he wanted to. Even the Royal Family could be subjected to constructive criticism, so it went without saying that even more was true for the Colonial Governments and Colonial Officials. Solomon often reminded his readers of the English constitution and applied his knowledge about it to his statements and critique of the colonial government and its legislations.

Be it ever remembered that the glorious Constitution of England allots to the aborigines and others of this Protectorate the right and province of openly and fearlessly canvassing and arraigning the official conduct of all who are duly invested with public Authority. It is the people who have the inalienable right of exercising censorial power over the Government and not vice versa. And what the British Constitution concedes to British Subjects de jure, in other words to Her Majesty's allies on the Gold Coast – And such we are.²¹

This strategy that combined written law and sound arguments was an educated way of outwitting the British officials, but it also placed Solomon under the supervising eye of the British officials.

J.E. Casely Hayford, author, lawyer and politician

Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford is well known for his involvement in Gold Coast politics as the president of the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society (ARPS) and founder and spearhead of the pan-African influenced National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) as well as for his productivity as a lawyer, activist, editor, public servant, author, philosopher and religious conviction. This man of many talents did several tours in England, the first in 1893–97 to study Law and the second in 1903 to write his first book. He is also known to have made visits in 1907, 1912 and 1920.²² Casely Hayford, differing from Sekyi (who's sojourns are discussed below on page 13), used the foreign country in his novel as his starting point and as the space in which he processed his transformation and experiences with colonialism. However, London did not symbolize the depravity of British civilization for Casely Hayford, as it did for Kobina Sekyi. Instead

²¹ Gold Coast Methodist Times 31.7.1897.

²² Jenkins, *Gold Coast historians* (1985), p. 547.

Casely Hayford praised London for its educational institutions and its intellectual space. However, he did not regard it as the cradle of human intellect. He invested himself in opposing the self-righteousness that prevailed among his white friends in the city. Consequently, he built a case for the African civilization and heritage by reasoning that Western knowledge was nothing more than the sum of information gained in antiquity by both white and black scholars. In that sense, Casely Hayford was an early critic of the Western-centred history writing. This is illustrated in the book *Ethiopia Unbound* through the dialogue and actions of the character Kwamankra (based on Casely Hayford himself) and his British friend Whitely as they were immersed in philosophical discussions while striding along Tottenham Court Road in London. They found a copy of Marcus Aurelius book in an old bookshop and derived his words to be in line with thinking that spanned all the way to ancient Ethiopians (meaning Africans in this context). They also thought about the possibility of Jesus having been a black man and that it was merely "habits of thought" that rendered this idea strange.²³

For Casely Hayford the time spent studying for the bar in London was arguably a powerful experience that strengthened his African identity. In *Ethiopia Unbound* he depicts that the main character had a furnished and decorated apartment following an Oriental style. There were carpets of leopard skins, African weapons hanging on the walls and all sorts of trinkets reminding him of home. If this is any indication of how Hayford himself adorned his London apartment is unknown, but as his main character Kwamankra put it: "I like to sniff a bit of the African air somehow where'er I go"²⁴. Joseph Casely Hayford was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple in London as a non-collegiate on the 17th of November 1896 after beginning his studies in 1893.²⁵ The following January he returned to the Gold Coast and soon afterwards started to practice law at Cape Coast, Axim,

²³ J.E. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation*. (C.M. Phillips: London 1911), p. 11.

²⁴ Casely Hayford (1911), p. 6.

²⁵ Cambridge Alumni Database: <http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search-2016.pl?sur=&suro=w&fir=&firo=c&cit=&cito=c&c=all&z=all&tex=HFRT893JE&sy=&eye=&col=all&maxcount=50> visited 23.1.2017.

Sekondi and Accra.²⁶ How much of the descriptions regarding Kwamankra that coincide with the actual student life of Casely Hayford is unknown, but his future stance on British colonialism through his involvement as the president of the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society (ARPS) and founder and spearhead of the pan-African influenced National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) as well as his journalist and literary activities at home and abroad were certainly inspired by his experiences abroad.

In 1903 when Casely Hayford returned to London he stayed at 13 Upper Bedford Place, close to Russel Square in Bloomsbury.²⁷ It was a popular neighbourhood for African students and scholars, situated near the British Museum and University buildings. During this trip he met and wed his wife Adelaide Smith. She was from a distinguished Sierra Leonean family and had lived abroad for extended periods of her life. At four years old, in 1872, her father brought the family to Norwood in London. Their stay there was short-lived and they allocated to the Isle of Jersey to alleviate the deteriorating health of her mother who, however, succumbed to her illness in the early age of 36 in 1876.²⁸

Throughout her life, Adelaide was introduced to notable Africans. Together with her sisters they ran a hostel in London and thus they were introduced to their tenant Victoria Davies, the protégée and goddaughter of Queen Victoria. Davies, in turn, introduced the Smiths to important people in London such as the famous composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and his family.²⁹ Adelaide later met with Afro-Americans such as W.E. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Maude Cuney Hare, Nannie H. Burroughs and Mrs Booker T. Washington.³⁰ The social acquaintances of both Casely and his wife were mutually beneficial for them. Even after they separated, Adelaide continued to keep up appearances and use her husband's name to her

²⁶ J.E Casely Hayford, *The Truth About The West African Land Question* (1898. Reprinted by Thoemmes Press & Edition Synapse: Bristol 2003), p. vi; The Gold Coast Chronicle 22.1.1897 informs that Hayford arrived in Accra with the steamship SS Accra on January 12 1897

²⁷ Adelaide M. Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford 1868-1960* (London: Frank Cass&Co.Ltd. 1986), p. 64.

²⁸ Cromwell (1986), p. 38.

²⁹ Jeffrey Green, *Black Edwardians: Black People in Britain 1901-1914* (Abingdon: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998), p. 186.

³⁰ Cromwell (1986), p. 1.

advantage when she did public appearances in the USA and elsewhere in order to gather financing for her Girl's Vocational and Industrial Training School in Freetown, Sierra Leone. In return, she spoke on behalf of her husband and wrote to him about people she had met who were interested in his work. She did not reveal the nature of their relationship to anybody as is reported in a letter from USA where she states that she acts "as if everything is all right" between them.³¹

Concerning accommodation, it was a common practice that black residents in England rented out rooms in their apartments to friends, relatives or other black persons who were studying, visiting or trying to make a living in England. Later, in the interwar period, with the increasing number of foreign students in Britain and their difficulties finding accommodation in London, student unions for both Asian and African students tried to shoulder the responsibilities of finding accommodation in London. The West African Students' Union (WASU), led by the Nigerian-born Lapido Solanke, set up a hostel on 62 Camden Road. Various other hostels were established in the above-mentioned Bloomsbury area where the bulk of foreign students lived and socialized. The Colonial Office together with the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) opened the Aggrey House on 47 Doughty Street, which resulted in a quarrel between the members of LCP and WASU because of the involvement of the Colonial Office.³² In general, it was easier to find a room in a hostel run by Africans than to find a room rented by the English.³³

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Casely Hayford was known as a lawyer who became increasingly vocal by publishing literary works such as "The Truth About The West African Land Question" in 1898 and "The Gold Coast Native Institutions" in 1903. His journalist background and letters to the press were also well-known among Gold Coasters. His career in public office began in 1916 as one of three Africans nominated to the Legislative Council. At this point, he had managed to publish three more books: *Ethiopia Unbound* in 1911, *Gold*

³¹ Cromwell (1986), p. 124.

³² Gemma Romain, *Race, Sexuality and Identity in Britain and Jamaica: The Biography of Patrick Nelson, 1916–1963* (Bloomsbury Academic: London 2017), p. 80.

³³ Romain (2017), p. 78.

Coast Land Tenure and the Forest Bill in 1911 and *William Waddy Harris, the West African reformer* in 1915. During the interwar period, his fame and success as an author had reached the educated Afro-Americans in the USA. After the sudden death of J.P. Herbert Brown, the editor of the *Gold Coast Leader*, Casely Hayford took over the management of the paper. Coincidentally, during this takeover he was also preparing a petition to the League of Nations Union as a member of a NCBWA delegation. The paper published the memorandums from the meetings in London with the committees of the League of Nations Union in which Hayford stressed the main points that he wished to emphasize. First of all, the petition called for the separation of the judicial functions from the executive in the colonial government. They also hoped Africans and Europeans would be treated equally when applying for public offices, which was not the case. Thirdly, they petitioned for funding for a West-African University so that the highest education would be at an arm's reach for every able Gold Coaster. The petition also questioned how it was possible that judges in Divisional Courts were eligible to serve as judges in Appeal Courts, reviewing their own cases. Lastly but most importantly, they stressed personal representation in Gold Coast Legislature. In other words, they asked to be allowed to appoint half of the members in the Legislative Council with the power of imposing taxation and discussing estimates of revenue and expenditure. The main reason of this last point was that it would carry out the "doctrine of taxation going with representation."³⁴

Kobina Sekyi, philosopher and critic

Kobina Sekyi frequently used the experiences of his personal sojourns as themes in his writing. Little is actually known of Sekyi's life and actions in England, as he seldom wrote specifically about them. Therefore, one has to try to decipher his writings in order to get an idea of his experiences. For example, in *the Blinkards*³⁵ he used the protagonist, a fictional version of him, to describe the experiences he had in England. His main character, Mr Onyimdze, is a young barrister who had been trained in England. On several occasions in the play, he reprimanded the local inhabitants on the Gold Coast for idealizing the British. At one of these

³⁴ *Gold Coast Leader* 8.1.1920.

³⁵ *The Blinkards* (Accra 1915), is a satirical play that was performed once by the Cosmopolitan Club in Cape Coast in 1915. Its popularity today is based on it being first published in 1974.

instances he was confronted and asked if his education was English or not, to which he answered:

It is mixed. I believe, at school here [the Gold Coast], I was more anglicised than I became after I had lived six months in England. By the time I finished my course, I found I had become a Fanti man who had studied and thought in England, rather than an anglicised Fanti, or a bleached Negro.³⁶

The sentiment that the character expresses is a sentiment that Sekyi very much shared. He had up until the time of his first sojourn to England in 1910 been an elitist Anglophone who admired the English gentleman of upper class origins. As a Western educated Eurafrican, Sekyi had definitely been an elite of the Gold Coast society. Even after his changed views of the English, his achievements put him in a distinct group of famous Gold Coast persons. As Kofi Baku explains, Sekyi saw himself as a direct heir to the line of the indigenous Fanti as well as Cape Coast political and intellectual tradition represented by Mensah Sarbah, Prince Brew of Dunkwa, W.E. Pietersen, J.P. Brown, Henry Van Hein and Attoh Ahuma. Baku leaves this statement with the addition that "[Sekyi] was, however, sometimes more forthright and exuberant and less tactful than all of them".³⁷

However, what is known about Sekyi's life in England during his first sojourn is two-edged. On the one hand, he excelled in his studies, being in the top of his class and securing an impressive academic record for his Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the University of London. On the other hand, he seemed to be withdrawn, spending most of his time by himself, occupied with his studies and philosophical writings for the Gold Coast press. This period became a defining moment in Sekyi's life, one during which he left behind his admiration for the British and avoided his black colleagues who attended social events among the English society.³⁸ Sekyi later described his first three years in England as merely a "lucid interval".³⁹

³⁶ Kobina Sekyi, *The Blinkards: A Comedy and the Anglo-Fanti – A Short Story* (1915. Reprinted by Readwide Publishers & Heinemann Educational Publishers: Accra 1997), p. 63.

³⁷ Kofi Baku, *An intellectual in nationalist politics: the contribution of Kobina Sekyi to the evolution of Ghanaian national consciousness* (University of Sussex: Brighton 1987, unpublished dissertation), p. 413.

³⁸ Baku (1987), p. 96–97.

³⁹ J. Avo Langley, 'Introduction' in *The Blinkards: A Comedy and the Anglo-Fanti – A Short Story* (Accra 1997), p. xvii.

As a university student Sekyi was in the prestigious group of a small elite. In the later half of the nineteenth century, chief-editors of Gold Coast newspapers propagated visibly for examinations in British universities. University of Oxford and University of Cambridge arguably surpassed every other university there was at the time, and were regarded as the most prestigious for educated Africans on the Gold Coast. This can be witnessed in the Gold Coast press in the late nineteenth century. The Gold Coast Echo writes in the issue printed for 16–31 May 1887:

The question of education must force itself on the mind of every thinking individual in the community. The progress of a nation is marked by the number of well educated persons which it possesses in its midst. There are degrees of education. There is that of the highest character which will carry a person into the realms of Literae Humaniores, i.e. of Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Jurisprudence, Modern History, and Theology at Oxford or the Triposes at Cambridge.⁴⁰

Earlier in the mid-nineteenth century, only a few families on the coast carried out the perceived responsibilities of educating their children in order to secure them non-manual jobs. However, when the Colony started to implement a stronger foothold on the Gold Coast, they needed a lot more employees. Due to the hostile climate, it was difficult to recruit Englishmen to West-African colonies. This meant that even a basic education could land Africans a job as a clerk with a monthly salary. The number of educated Africans therefore grew rapidly and it also became more necessary for the highest educated to emphasize differences of the quality of education. One could say that the Gold Coast community became meritocratic by nature. It granted its highest praises and honors to the most distinguished scholars among its members. One might argue that this put a lot of pressure on students abroad. The Gold Coast news press, for one, followed and reported eagerly on their academic success, as in the case of *the Gold Coast Nation* reporting on Sekyi's successes:

Mr. Kobina Sekyi has scored another splendid success in his London University Second Year's Examinations. In the three subjects, Modern Philosophy, Greek Philosophy and Ethics he took the Prize in the first, a First class in the Second and a Second class in the last, a very good all round performance highly creditable to the young student and he has our most cordial congratulations.⁴¹

If we were a demonstrative people we would make a great show of the phenomenal distinction gained by Mr. W. E. Gwira Sekyi, son of the late Mr. J. Gladstone Sackey and a

⁴⁰ Gold Coast Echo 16–31.5.1887.

⁴¹ Gold Coast Nation 7.8.1913.

grandson of the present Chief-Regent of Cape Coast, in passing the B.A. degree (London University) with honours. The degrees of the University of London are universally acknowledged to be synonymous with hard study and exceptional ability and Mr. Sekyi, we stand corrected, is the first West African to pass the Arts degree of the world-famous University with honours. We extend to him our congratulations and trust he will also come out top in his Bar Examinations which we are watching with the same solicitude as we have hitherto done in the course of his studies in England.⁴²

The years studying abroad could also be viewed as a form of service for the country, as the same paper stated a few years later when reporting on T. Hutton-Mills and again on Sekyi.

In a report of a Bar Examination recently held Mr. Sekyi passed his final examination of the Cornical of Legal Examination at Easter Term and Mr. T. Hutton-Mills passed in Criminal Law. We congratulate our young countrymen and look forward to their coming home after a time to do service for their country.⁴³

However, social status based on academic success was something that was embedded in the Eurafican society much earlier. Already in 1852 Governor Henry W. Hill noted that the educated "class" based their position in their society on merits, not on race or descent.⁴⁴ Regardless of not being a question of race or descent, a large part of the population in the country were denied an opportunity to pursue higher education and thus fell behind. In 1956, literacy levels on the Gold Coast were still at about 10 per cent of the population, making the highly educated a small minority.⁴⁵

In Sekyi's short story, "the Anglo-Fanti", there is an interesting description of a voyage from the Gold Coast to London, which certainly hints of Sekyi's own experiences of the transition from his home to England. It depicts a reconfiguration of the young traveller's mind as he moved through space towards London. The passenger in Sekyi's story was a student called Kwesi who had just arrived by boat in Plymouth from where he then boarded a train to London. During the train ride, Kwesi's mental map of England changed dramatically. At first, he encountered the picturesque countryside that initially confirmed his idealized image of Britain, but soon thereafter he closed in on the

⁴² Gold Coast Nation 28.1.1915. As a side note one reader of the GCN later pointed out that indeed a Mr. A. O. Delo Dosumu from Lagos had previous to Sekyi received the B.A. from University of London with honours, GCN 11.2.1915.

⁴³ Gold Coast Nation 25.5-1.6.1918.

⁴⁴ Kimble (1963), p. 87.

⁴⁵ K.A. Busia, "The Present Situation and Aspirations of Elites in the Gold Coast" in *International Social Science Bulletin* 8:3 (1956), p. 429.

urban areas, passing town after town that turned gloomier the closer they came to London. The depiction of this experience is very detailed and points to the writer's ambition to depict it as a sudden and dramatic change in the story of the young student's life. In addition, it resembles a lot that of "Samuel's" description of his train ride to London.

The ending of Kwesi's train ride is riddled with symbolic meaning.

At last, after passing through the worst neighbourhood he has yet seen, the train enters and stops at a tremendous, very black station, where there is more bustle than he has ever seen. By this time his ideas of England as a paradise are menaced.⁴⁶

What is interesting and maybe surprising is that Sekyi depicts this destruction of the idealized England as an almost instantaneous event. For Kwesi, as the main character in the book, it was merely the spatial relocation and surroundings that determined his changed opinion of England. Seemingly, there had been no personal contact by any other person that could have influenced this transformation of his mental image of the country.

This metaphor is contradictory to Sekyi's own re-evaluation of his English sentiments. Instead of having an instant epiphany as Kwesi has in "the Anglo-Fanti", Baku writes that Sekyi maintained his positive attitude of England most of his first year in London.⁴⁷ However, he did have a dramatic experience on one of his passages from England, when a torpedo from a German U28-boat hit his ship *SS Falaba* in the Irish Sea with tragic consequences, leaving at least 104 persons dead. While trying to survive the attack by climbing into a lifeboat, a European shouted at Sekyi to get out, as he, as a black man, had no right to be alive when whites were drowning.⁴⁸

One main reason that led Sekyi to write "The Anglo-Fanti" was probably the experiences of the First World War and its effects on the colonies. As Kimble notes, the war led to a "notable revival of cultural nationalism" during and after

⁴⁶ Sekyi (1997), p. 229.

⁴⁷ Baku (1987), p. 97.

⁴⁸ Sekyi (1997), p. xvii-xix. According to reports in the Gold Coast Nation, 112 persons died in the attack, see GCN 15.4.1915.

the war in which Sekyi played an active role. Sekyi supported a sentiment expressed in the press that “if they were good enough to fight and die in the Empire’s cause, they were good enough ... to have a share in the Government of their countries”⁴⁹. While the war did not directly spread to the Gold Coast soil, some three thousand men were recruited to fight abroad and funds were collected for the military cause. This was arguably the first time that many Africans, besides those who had studied abroad, got to experience being away from their country and seeing the impact of global conflicts. Kimble argues that this led them to develop a sense of a common cause and demand for equal status between the races.⁵⁰

The Gold Coast press as the fourth and only estate

Solomon and Sekyi as well as Adelaide and J. E. Casely Hayford all contributed to the Gold Coast newspapers in some way during the first half of the twentieth century. While S.R.B. Solomon and Casely Hayford managed and edited their own papers, most educated and literary productive Eurafricans who published in papers did so by contributing with stories directly to selected papers. Kobina Sekyi, for instance, wrote extensively to different Gold Coast papers during his lifetime and was a regular writer for the Gold Coast Spectator, the Gold Coast Observer and the Gold Coast Times in the 1930s and 40s.

The role of the press has not yet been addressed in this paper, but is of outmost importance because of the arguments that Eurafricans used newspapers as their political mouthpieces and also to anonymously debate colonial affairs and provoke government officials. Stephanie Newell has discussed the role of pseudonyms and the Gold Coast press in her book "The Power To Name". She argues that until the mid-1930s, it was the exception rather than the rule to publish under pseudonyms. The government tried to control the newspapers a few times by restricting their operations and by suing them for seditious material or libel. However, this was a difficult task, since silencing and censoring papers contradicted with the British tradition of the freedom of the press.

⁴⁹ The Gold Coast Independent, 22.10.1921.

⁵⁰ Kimble (1963), p. 545.

Editors had promised to guarantee their contributors' anonymity with the risk of imprisonment.⁵¹ Suits generally failed and the government had to tread lightly to not stir up a commotion among the public in Great Britain who supported the liberal ideals of the Empire.⁵²

Historians on Ghana have, from time to time, perceived the Gold Coast press as an operation run by a close-knit group of educated Gold Coast elites. Despite being seen as a small group, they constituted an upper class echelon whose concerns of the rest of the colony's inhabitants were trumped by their elite aspirations and mutual admiration. While I agree that many of the persons involved in the press saw themselves as belonging to an elite, eager to shoulder the role as the governing body on the Gold Coast, I argue that they were aware of the fact that they could not sustain the role of opposing and criticising the government alone. They needed allies and supporters and were constantly communicating with other communities on the Gold Coast as well as other West-African colonies. The educated Eurafrican elite found ways in which to interact with other British colonial citizens and forged networks between native chiefs, merchants and a growing working class.

For Africans it was difficult to actively participate in decision-making processes and other public colonial spaces. However, as demonstrated by Eurafrican lawyers, it was possible to create places where Africans could voice concerns, one of these being the podium in courts. Others found ways of participating in meetings and conversing with government officials face-to-face as unofficial members of the Legislative Council, or by sending delegations directly to the Colonial Office in London. However, a lot of pleading with the European administrators happened at social events outside office hours. There were several possibilities to meet at European-African gatherings, such as the popular "at home" receptions that were thrown to entertain the high society in Gold Coast towns. As an example, when the Gold Coast Chronicle reported on Mrs

⁵¹ Stephanie Newell, *The Power to Name* (Ohio University Press: Athens 2013), p. 10.

⁵² Newell, (2013), p. 11.

Hutton Mills' "at home" party in Cape Coast, they recorded the number of guests being 67 of which 35 were European.⁵³

However, returning to newspapers, papers were arguably the most public and vociferous spaces on the Gold Coast. Referring to a colonial setting where representation and democratic processes were, to say the least, suppressed, the Gold Coast Leader publicly announced in 1905 that the press was "Our Fourth and Only Estate".⁵⁴ Newell has also interestingly pointed out that, between the 1880's and the II World War, the West African press came close to realizing the utopian model for the public sphere presented and developed by Jürgen Habermas. He had set his case in the early eighteenth-century Europe, where during a brief utopian moment in the evolution of the public sphere, a bourgeois space between the society and state emerged in which the public organized itself as the bearer of public opinion. The space was further defined as "a non-hierarchical environment in which consensus was built through processes of free, critical, rational dialogue between bourgeois citizens as they emerged from feudal hierarchies in early modern Europe." While this moment between society and state was short-lived and quickly suppressed by the emergence of private corporations and state interventionism, it had allowed open dialogue in coffeehouses, salons and social clubs as well as in printed materials such as novels, periodicals and pamphlets much in the same way as in colonial West Africa.⁵⁵ West African journalists knowingly addressed the "enlightened" readers in London in order to gain support for their cases for press freedom and their call for a liberal public sphere. For the British government, this created difficult problems with public relations.⁵⁶

Around 90 known newspapers were published between the late nineteenth century and mid-twentieth century on the Gold Coast. Because newspapers usually focused on current events, they were read and soon discarded afterwards. This makes it difficult to know the exact number of published titles,

⁵³ Gold Coast Chronicle 28.11.1896.

⁵⁴ Newell, (2013), p. 31.

⁵⁵ Newell, (2013), p. 29–30.

⁵⁶ Newell (2013), p. 74.

as some were short-lived and forgotten.⁵⁷ However, some issues were more important than others and sometimes whole papers or clippings were saved for later use as references. This was especially the case with stories that were published in parts in consecutive issues. Some journalists were also on a mission to educate laymen, using the press as a platform. T.J. Sawyerr, a Sierra Leonean newspaperman and bookshop owner, published lists of useful literature for writing essays, articles and doing research. He instructed readers to save his lists and instructions on how to improve their writing, and use them as references in future contributions to the press.⁵⁸ Furthermore, papers were rich sources of information that could be read out loud to the illiterate. Through them, the outside world became smaller and more accessible. Profound practical evidence on the interconnectedness between Britain and its colonies were the contributions and reports written by Eurafricans residing in Britain.

Writers and editors at newspapers often came from Eurafrican communities which for generations had learned to master the English language and interpret English law. Contacts to metropolitan cities and time spent studying abroad had broadened their knowledge of current political ideas and also prepared them to use different tactics in their domestic affairs. Therefore, it is not surprising that newspapermen used their personal networks to circulate stories from other papers and publications in English. Although papers seldom came to a complete understanding about issues, and competing newspapers as well as rivalling readers fought each other for different reasons, there was a special culture felt in Gold Coast papers that enforced the feeling of identity and belonging. To argue that the persons involved in contributing with articles, editing and publishing as well as distributing and consuming newspaper contents formed an imagined community and public space is not far-fetched.⁵⁹ For instance, common themes of resistance, such as opposing bad legislature, petitioning for representation

⁵⁷ Audrey Sitsofe Gadzekpo, *Women's engagement with Gold Coast print culture from 1857 to 1957* (University of Birmingham: Birmingham 2001, unpublished dissertation), p. 14.

⁵⁸ Newell (2013), p.

⁵⁹ I refer to Benedict Anderson's characterization of imagined communities as reciprocal and horizontal communities with a shared past and future that creates solidarity and a sense of belonging. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: London 1991).

with taxation, supporting the rise of pan-Africanism, accusing the government for racism and unjust treatment, promoting and encouraging education among colonized Gold Coasters as well as normalizing a proto-nationalist language point to this.

After the Second World War, new generations of African activists became even more politically involved and organized. Among those Africans who travelled abroad to study, were future leaders of nationalist movements that were able to reform the foundations of domestic political organizations in order to gain the support of labourers and lower classes which earlier had been more or less marginalized from participating. The government became increasingly worried about opposition to the British rule and were, among other things, worried of the rise of communism. Therefore, restrictions against the press became more commonplace in colonies and were seen as justified. However, perhaps surprisingly, while censorship in the 1940s was put in place in 7 colonies, the West-African colonies were not affected.⁶⁰ This discussion extends beyond the aim of this paper, but it is worth mentioning that the British seemed to have regarded the West-African colonies as relatively stable and orderly even after decades of strong opposition in the press. This might be a testament to the mostly intellectual and scholarly debates which took place in newspapers and seldom developed into protests and physical altercations in the streets.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have broadly depicted some of the known travels between the Gold Coast and Britain by Samuel Solomon, J.E Casely Hayford and Kobina Sekyi. I have argued that these persons became more focused on their roles as educators, activists and politicians during these sojourns. By meeting other students in London or coming into contact with key persons such as the likes of Adelaide Smith, they broadened their worldviews and forged important personal networks. It was also, in part, their experiences with racist prejudice in Europe

⁶⁰ Newell (2013), p. 69.

that influenced these “black Englishmen” to revise their thoughts about the civilized man and turn to search for an African identity rather than a European.

When returning home to the Gold Coast, these men were eager to begin their professions, but they also helped to develop the public space through newspapers and their contributions to them. Their actions as educated agitators and authors proved to bear fruit, as was witnessed by the precedent of the Lands Bill dispute that ended in the British dropping it. This encouraged the men, especially as actors in the media, to continue provoking and influencing the colonial administration through different tactics. Arguably, what I would call global binoculars allowed them to contrast and deploy different strategies on the Gold Coast. They did this by looking for solutions in different places around the world where unjust rule was being tackled, or by relating to their own experiences in foreign lands where the relations between society and state were openly debated and improved.