

RELIGION AND ECONOMY IN THE AGE OF NEO-LIBERALISM- MARKET AND SOCIETY IN GHANA: A HISTORICAL REVIEW.

(Working Paper)

1. The setting and the problem

In this paper I will try to deal with the main topic of the conference, that is the “market versus society” through the examination of the socio-economic history of Ghana. I will attempt to answer the question whether the “market versus society”-schema corresponds to a universal condition, or it is just a Euro-American inter-capitalist and inter-western political problem.

I became familiar with the contemporary socio-economic reality in Ghana by conducting my doctoral field-research in this country in 2004 and 2005, and after that by studying the political and economic history of the country in order to compose my doctoral thesis (Kyriakakis 2010). In this paper I will present first a concise description of the political and economic history of Ghana second some findings of my fieldwork which relate to economy, society and religion, and third, I will discuss the theoretical question at hand, namely, whether the market versus society dilemma is the real source of social conflicts in Ghana and beyond.

2. Pre-colonial Period

Ghana before the independence was called “Gold Coast” and it was a British colony from 1870 to 1957. A British protectorate in the coast was established already from 1844, while Ashanti and Northern region were annexed in 1896 and 1901 respectively.

Prior to colonial regime, western merchants and small military units had established fortified trade stations along the coast for more than 300 years. For all that long period Portuguese, Dutch, Swedes, Danes, French and English merchants competed one-another over the main trade products which were mainly slaves and gold from the interior. Europeans traded gold and slaves for gun-powder, textile, alcohol and domestic goods coming from Europe (Naylor 2000). This general condition was supported by four major regional economic and political units: The Ashanti Kingdom in the interior, the satellite small states and chiefdoms around the Ashanti kingdom, the Europeans along the coast and the local middlemen between the Europeans and the Ashantis, members of the coastal ethnic groups. Up to the middle of 19th century agricultural production was based on a system of cultivation of subsistence crops on lineage lands. The Ashanti, building upon the extant system of small and middle-sized chiefdoms composed largely of subsistence lineage-based village units, had come to rule as satellites or tributaries nearly all of present-day Ghana (Wilks 1969, 1975, Grier 1981:23). Ashanti used the satellite states as a source of troops for defensive and offensive purposes and the tributary states as a source of gold and slaves. Slaves were either sold to the coast or used for domestic production consumed by the household, for production of goods sold to urban centres, for mining the gold and for carrying trade goods at trading expeditions.

This system can be described in Karl Polanyi terms as redistributive (Polanyi 1963, Lie 1991). In terms of market exchange, it is obvious that neither a market system was evident not even the sperms of a future market system, since the factor of individual producers was absent. Even the middlemen between the Ashantis and Europeans were operating within monopolistic restrictions and there was not real antagonism among them. They constituted rather a status group protected by the Europeans rather than an emerging bourgeoisie. In reality over the centuries two great monopolistic redistributive powers emerged in the region, the Ashanti in the interior and the Europeans along the coast. The Europeans dominated over the coastal ethnic groups, either directly or indirectly and the Ashantis controlled all the ethnic groups of the interior. Europeans, of course shipped the largest portion of the trade back to Europe, but they also spent some resources in order to maintain control over the coastal region. Slave or pawn labour supported this system and reciprocity prevailed only within some of the subservient groups. Exchange between the dominant groups was not regulated by any market mechanism but by political domination, military power and the control over the resources.

In terms of society, fragmentation and domination does not allow us to speak of any kind of social integration between the various groups operating in the region throughout this period. Coercion, military expeditions, slave raids and warfare among all the ethnic and political groups present in the region was the usual pattern of social relationships.

3. Colonial Period

This condition changes radically from the middle of 19th century onwards with four major and interrelated developments. The first is the abolition of slavery, the second is the coming of Christian missionaries, the third is the introduction of cash crops, and the fourth is the imposition of colonial rule. The abolition of slavery in 1807 forced the British to battle against the Dutch and the Portuguese who continued to engage with slave trade up to 1870s and on the other hand directed their trade-interests with the interior towards gold exclusively. This intensified the struggle among Europeans and it became evident that one European nation alone would prevail in gold-trade monopoly. Gradually the British managed to win the battle and to kick out of the Gold Coast all other European forces. At the same time the first modern Christian missions arrived. The first missionaries of the Basel mission an inter-denominational Protestant organisation arrived at Christianborg Castle outside Accra, which by then was occupied by the Danes, in December 1828. A Methodist mission arrived at Cape Coast in 1835 (Bartels 1965, Debrunner 1967).

Basel and Methodist missions were proved to be very important for Ghana modern history. Although many other missions and denominations followed them towards the end of the 19th century, and despite the fact that Roman Catholics and Pentecostals dominated during the 20th century, the impact of the Basel mission and the Methodist upon Ghanaian society and economy has never been surpassed by anyone else. Basel mission had strong Presbyterian influences and affiliations. They believed in the ideal of building separate Christian communities outside the

existent social structure. After a few years of their arrival they moved to Akropong, a rural area 30 miles north of Accra and they established communities where new crafts were taught and experimentation with cultivation of new crops took place. Their schools emphasised technical agricultural and professional training targeting at the establishment of self sufficient Christian villages beside the old social organisation of subsistence agriculture and dependent labour economy. It was within this mission that cocoa cultivation was first attempted, a crop which some decades later made Ghana the largest cocoa-producer country in the world!

On the other hand the Methodists settled in Cape Coast, the ex-slave-trade centre of the coast, where a small community of local Christians existed already, converted by Anglican chaplains who had followed the British troops since 1750. All these people were local middlemen and interpreters for slave and gold trade in the past. The Methodists established schools with the emphasis given on teaching English and accounting. The Methodist community in Cape Coast grew with the years and became the cradle of a new breed of merchants and middlemen, and later the source of Ghanaian nationalism, providing with members and leadership the “Aborigines Rights Protection Society”, the first attempt for organised political opposition against the colonial government in the 1890s. As said already, however, the slave trade which was the main source of European commercial goods to local populations had ceased some years earlier. This trade was gradually substituted by agricultural products trade, first palm oil and later rubber and cocoa. This development instigated cash crop production, initially without the support of the British who were interested only in gold. Rhoda Howard-Hassman (1980:69), a Canadian economic historian writes about this specific development:

Palm oil was produced in Ghana from the 1850's over twenty years before the colonial state took control of the Gold Coast. Rubber became an important Ghanaian crop in the 1890's after the British had taken formal control of the colony but before the colonial state had sufficient resources even through physical coercion to enforce agricultural policies which peasants resisted. Cocoa vastly overshadowed all other exports from Ghana by 1910, yet the government agriculture department did not begin to promote its export until well after production had been established through the enterprise of individual peasants. Exports of cash crops took place, furthermore, without even infrastructural assistance from the colonial government, which was preoccupied with building railways to import machinery for the Ashanti gold mines. Many cocoa-producers villages built their own roads in order to get their crops out to the buyers.

We see that cash crops were initially not encouraged by colonial rule, but by local traders, individual European merchants and Christian missions. Christian missionaries hoped that the transformation of local populations from lineage dependants into individual farmers and city-merchants would detach them from their traditional way of life and religion, and it would consolidate their Christian allegiance. The introduction of cash crops was a huge success. It gave new

economic incentives to large groups of people and it changed the economic conditions of the region for ever. Especially cocoa cultivation spread along the entire middle belt between the coastal tropical zone and the northern Savannah-zone, while palm, rubber and copra plantations spread in the south. In the following table you can see the growth in value and volume of cocoa exports over the years:

Cocoa export Value	
1898	£ 9,616
1911	£ 1,613,468
1917	£ 3,146,851 (Smith 1966:137)

Cocoa export Volume	
1895	5 tons
1930	218,895 tons (Larbi 2001:39)

Table 1. Cocoa Production the first three decades

Similarly spectacular was the growth in numbers of Christian converts during the three first decades of the 20th century. In the following table you can see the numbers of Christian converts in 1885, before the cocoa boom, and the same numbers in 1934. Note that the two periods of conversion are equal, 50 years each, while the missions that are not present in the first period arrived in Gold Coast only after the 1880's:

1885

Anglicans	800
Methodists	6, 855
Basel mission	6, 800
Bremen mission	717

1934

Anglican Church	24,000
Methodist Church	125,225
Presbyterian Church of Ghana (descendant of Basel mission)	58,454
Baptist Church	6,000
Roman Catholic Church	167,036
Ewe Presbyterian Church (descendant of Bremen mission)	27,000
Salvation Army	6,386
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church	7,064

Table 2. Christian representation the first 100 years of modern missionary activity (Bartels 1965).

However, this vast economic change with the introduction of cash crops did not change as much as one would expect social relationships and power structures in the region. Chiefs, lineage heads and former hereditary rulers, heads of the various royal lineages of the former Ashanti satellite and tributary states, took advantage of their strategic position in pre-colonial economy and they acted as sub-brokers for the gathering and transportation of cash crops, along with the allocation of land. They also had at their disposition domestic slave force which they could use for cash crops cultivation themselves. Land, however, remained, communal and lineage owned. Chiefs and brokers therefore had better access to the coastal merchants, and thus to the newly introduced monetary means of exchange (money). Instead of inequalities in property and accumulation of “means of production” (that is land, land rights, labour force and mechanised tools of production) a system of lenders and debtors developed and the formation of rich and poor peasants followed in the place of former hereditary rulers and subsistence cultivators. The results of such a development are noted by Howard Hassman (1980:73) and Roseberry (1978:8):

The lender who took usufruct as security in Ghana would paralyse the productive forces in so far as he would work the land as quickly as possible to maximise his profit, without investing in it or conserving it. The borrower would be alienated from his means of production in so far as he would now be “hired” by the creditor to work what had previously been his own land. Nevertheless the incomplete transition of borrower and lender to landless rural proletariat and landowner stymied the systemic change to capitalism which might have resulted in greater investment in, and productivity of, land.

One would expect in such a condition the colonial government to encourage the abolition of traditional land rights and to establish a free land market. In fact the opposite happened! What happened was the legislative intervention of colonial government in 1917 in favour of lineage land rights against the privatisation of land (Grier 1981:35-38, Kimble 1971: 533-34). This occurred because the colonial government wished to create a surplus of products rather than a surplus of income which would lead to the formation of domestic capital. Cash crop production became a free market commodity only after it passed onto the hands of British exporters, when it entered the international market. Therefore, the retention of very low productivity of labour, due to the lineage system of production, a very poor infrastructure and a very broad base of brokers and middlemen (38,500 individuals were intermediary cocoa brokers in coastal towns in 1938, -Grier 1981:39) blocked both domestic growth and domestic capital accumulation, despite the huge increase in production.

The result was that colonial intervention consolidated a status group of wealthy peasants and brokers, which was not a class since they did not own or invest in the land, but took advantage of their position between cultivators and international trade in order to accumulate wealth through appropriation of crops and dependant labour as well as social capital in the new conditions. This status group was a direct posterity of the Ashanti and satellite states aristocratic rulers along with some Fanti and Akwapim, southern merchants. Migrants, poor peasants and middle peasants were all subject ultimately to the economic power of the money lender, the cocoa broker (who bought their crop for sale to the European buyer) and the chiefs and lineage heads who distributed the land. Sometimes the broker, the moneylender and the chief were all the same person, in short, the local “big man”; often, he was also rich peasant engaged in cash-crop farming himself (Howard 1980:75).

In summary the introduction of cash crops combined with the retention of traditional lineage and land rights resulted first the transformation of lineage subsistence production into peasant production and then the stratification of agricultural communities into rich, middle and poor peasants. The close connection of all those social strata with developments in urban centres is evident. Apart from the brokers of towns and cities who served as middlemen between the bush and the European merchants, most of the urban population during the colonial period and beyond came from rural areas. Chiefs’ offspring came in order to become teachers, lawyers, small businessmen and later politicians, indebted middle peasants to become catechists, clerks or to seek a way to migrate to Europe and poor peasants to find any sort of employment and survival.

What we can make out of this description of the colonial regime of that period in terms of market and society? In terms of the market I hope that it becomes clear that the domestic market remains redistributive and a transition into a capitalist market never occurs. There is neither a free land market nor a free labour market and no capital accumulation. All production is gathered by the colonists and only when it exits the domestic economy becomes a commodity in capitalist terms. In terms of society we have a continuity of the structural inequalities of the pre-colonial period with some interesting changes on social stratification and inequalities. A new status group of the urban educated middle strata emerges strongly affiliated with Christian churches, cut off from their rural past with a semi-Christian and semi-pan-African political agenda. Cash crops, colonial regime and generalised indirect rule weaken the position of the old Ashanti Kingdom and strengthen the position of all other ethnic groups. However none of these developments leads to the formation of social classes which would connect themselves and struggle one another within a common economic process. Therefore the notion of society is rather non applicable for colonial Ghana. Divisions are regional, ethnic, religious and status in terms of education and access to luxury goods, and social integration occurs only to some extent only in the coastal cities forming in that way a deep cleavage and huge inequalities between urban and rural

life. Even in the cities, however, religious institutions offered the sense of community and belonging more than any other social institution.

4. Post-Colonial Period

Let us now pass to the period of independence. Ghana was the first Sub-Saharan country which gained its independence in 1957. The leader of the independence struggle, and the first president of Ghana was Kwame Nkruma, a Marxist and a Roman Catholic, who, however had a lot of sympathies and drew many of his deputies from the ranks of the Methodist church. When Nkruma and his party came to power, Ghana had zero debt and zero-deficit. However, it also had very poor infrastructure and almost a non-existent domestic industry, while all welfare institutions including schools, hospitals and dispensaries were controlled and owned by the Christian churches. Inspired by his Marxist and Leninist ideas Nkruma set out a plan of rapid industrialisation and huge public investment in schools, universities, hospitals, roads, railways, power stations (the Volta dam is the biggest in the world) and state-owned enterprises and industries. The basic recourses for supporting this plan were intended to be the revenues from the export crops, majorly cocoa. The idea was to replace imports by domestic production and thus make Ghana economically independent. The problems of this plan was that first, it relied exclusively on finances from export crops, and second, and more important, that it made no provision at all for the improvement of agricultural productivity (Anin 1987, Frimpong-Ansah 1991, Hutchful 2002). The first result was that Ghana became heavily dependent on the fluctuation of the prices of global export goods market.

The plan proved itself to be very ambitious and industrialisation required experts and technological support from abroad. The fixed producers' prices of cocoa were very low and lots of producers preferred a safer salary in a state enterprise. In practice the state extracted the surplus from the peasants in order to finance industrialisation. The number of civil servants grew with the years and a patron-client system was formed as the state was almost the exclusive provider of employment. Domestic market prices were fixed and this gave rise to a huge informal sector and an extended black market often managed by corrupted state officials. Structural inequalities grew bigger in time, and the state started to borrow in order to sustain its projects. Nkruma was overthrown in 1966 by a military coup, according to some analysts (Gifford 1998), organised by the CIA. Nevertheless his successors, three military dictatorships and two democratic intervals up to 1983 continued more or less the same policy. Each regime came to power with the promise of change but in fact they just retained the same structure changing only the various groups of political clientele and international lenders who kept them in power.

At the mid seventies a rapid decline in cocoa international prices, an extended drought and the extradition of 1,500,000 Ghanaians expatriates from Nigeria, combined with the mid-seventies global crisis brought Ghana to its knees to extreme poverty and to virtual bankruptcy. In 1983

the World Bank and the IMF entered Ghana with a structural adjustment program for economic recovery. The conditions of IMF and World Bank loans were the sweeping privatisation of state enterprises, the radical reduction of the public sector, the abolition of the fixed domestic market prices and the deregulation of the currency. In ten years Ghana state sold whatever could be sold, industries, communications, power and mining companies, while hundreds of thousands civil servants were fired. However, the buyers were not national capitalists apart of some small industrial units which were shared among previous state-officials. Nor were all enterprises profitable. Most enterprises were simply shut down, while the profitable were sold to foreign investors. Mining rights were granted to foreign firms which poured into Ghana from Australia, Canada and South Africa. What then IMF and the World Bank did was not to save Ghana from its debts but to allow foreign capital to enter and plunder the most profitable sectors of the economy. Ghana continued to find itself in a permanent debt crisis struggling with new loans and new treaties with the international lenders, up to the present.

What we can make out of this condition in terms of market and society? At first the efforts of the first 3 decades of post-colonial governments did not aim at the establishment of a capitalist market but the opposite. The governments attempted to establish a state dominated redistributive market rather than a capitalist one. These attempts were not even leading to a “state capitalism” since the industrialisation project was never realised. Although dependent on the international capitalist market, the domestic market in Ghana never became really capitalist. In terms of society, I have to admit that the Nkruma project was the first serious effort to create a unified “society” in Ghana. However, his insistence in imposing or even inventing an educated working class at the expense of the actual rural producers alienated the latter and put them in the position of his main political rivals. The real problem was that different norms of social relationships prevailed in the cities and different ones in rural areas reflecting the two parallel modes of production and exchange, resulting in a deep social gap between the two. The only institutions who struggled to bridge the gap were the religious ones, mainly the Christian churches but in vain. In fact they fell into that gap!

As I said earlier, Nkruma attempted to build a welfare state, but this attempt especially after his deposition failed, while after the IMF invasion it totally collapsed. The gap was attempted to be filled by the Christian churches. However, throughout the period after independence the Christian activity was quite different from the one of the first missionaries. Hundreds of new churches were established by local “prophets” and “Apostoles” who fled from the European churches and founded their own church or their own prayer and healing camp. At the same time new Pentecostal and Evangelical missions arrived from America and Europe. When I arrived in Ghana in November 2003, more than three thousand different Christian denominations were active in Ghana. Some of them operated only in one neighbourhood or village, others maintained a network that spread in many regions. The roots of this amazing Christian

pluralism can be traced back in the first European missionaries, and their promise that Christian faith would bring in Ghana the benefits of western civilisation.

As the Christian missions spread and entered the interior Christian themes were mixed with local traditional cosmology which attributed misfortune to the intervention of witches, local gods and spirits. This theological mixture, denied by the European Christian Churches, became the main explanatory ideology of the masses for Ghana's permanent underdevelopment. The various regimes, especially the military ones, encouraged such interpretations. On the other hand all these popular churches offered shelter, solidarity and hope in a highly heterogeneous and desperate clientele especially in the cities, and some employment opportunity to the educated youth who became pastors and preachers. People poured into the churches and the churches promised to the members a miracle: to find a job, to be granted a visa to Europe, to become rich. The only requirement was to cut off from the past, the lineage and the gods of traditional religion. This, in my interpretation, constitutes a sort of internalisation of the colonial, post-colonial and IMF imperialist discourse. Ghanaians blame themselves for underdevelopment and for policies imposed upon them by others.

5. My fieldwork-village in 2004-2005

This was the situation I met, when I first visited Ghana in 2003. Due to lack of time I will not describe the conditions in the village of Teleku Bokazo in Southwestern Ghana, where I conducted fieldwork in 2004 and 2005. I will show you only two tables, one on economic and the other on religious professions and affiliations, as a sort of justification of the historical description I presented in this paper:

Profession	persons	percentage
Farmers	340	32.5%
Teachers	43	4%
Craftsmen (carpenters, electricians, masons, mechanics, smiths, drivers)	49	4.7%
Craftswomen (seamstresses, hairdressers)	24	2.5%
Shopkeepers/Entrepreneurs	14	1.5%
Workers and Apprentices	32	3%
Food Sellers (all women)	47	4.5%
Market Women and Petty-traders	151	14.4%
Miners	10	0.9%
Students	193	18.5%
Unemployed	140	13.5%
Total	1043	100%

Table 3: Distribution of Professions/Economic Activities in Teleku Bokazo (April 2004)

Church/Faith	Members	%	Origin	Arrival in Village
Roman Catholic	265	25.4%	Europe/SMA	around 1925
12 Apostles Church	80	7.7%	Local /Western R.	1945
Methodist	94	9.0%	Europe/UK	around 1970; renewal 1991
Church of Pentecost	100	9.6%	Cape Coast	1979
Sacred Action Church	89	8.5%	Local /Western R.	1983
Christ Apostolic Church	64	6.1%	Eastern Region	1991
Assemblies of God	52	5.0%	USA	1992
Church of Christ	35	3.4%	USA	1994
New Apostolic Church	21	2.0%	Germany	1995
Seventh Day Adventist	43	4.1%	USA	1996
Deeper Life Church	9	0.9%	Nigeria	1996
Other Christian churches not represented in the village	24	2.3%		
Traditional	15	1.4%		
Muslims	51	4.9%		
No church	101	9.7%		
TOTAL	1,043	100%		
St George of Calvary Healing and Deliverance Prayer Centre	approx. 150-200 regular attendees			1997

TABLE 4: Religious affiliation in Teleku Bokazo according to survey conducted in April-May 2004

Let us call these two tables the economic and the religious table. In the religious table, apart from the extra-ordinary number of Churches for a village of 1,500 inhabitants one can see how many Christian churches have established themselves in the village after 1983, that is, the IMF-World Bank invasion.

In the economic table, there are some bizarre findings. First the farmers, exclusively preoccupied with coconut tree cultivation in that area, are too few. The national average of farmers is 60% and in the percentage of farmers in the village barely reaches the half of it. There are also too many petty traders, food sellers and market women, too many students and too many unemployed youth. The secret here is twofold: First that, after IMF all agricultural subsidies in seeds, fertilisers and other benefits have been abolished. The area is tropical and one needs hired labour in order to clear the bush and plant cash crops which last for forty years. But weeding out the tropical weeds must take place twice a year and this needs often hired labour as well. Poverty and the lack of money reduced the number of farmers over the years.

The most important, however, was the fact that the area is also a gold-mining area. Outside the village an illegal gold-mine operated. Legal gold-mines leased by western multinational gold-mining companies operated in neighbouring villages, but the wage there was just 1.5 euro per day. In the black market, though, 1 gram of gold is sold for 6 euros. In the illegal mine everyone was free to dig for gold and mavericks poured into the village from all over Ghana as well as from the neighbouring Ivory Coast. The mine was illegal because it was in fact leased by a multi-national company, which was in legal battle with the villagers. Therefore most of the “students” the “unemployed” and even the “traders” were in fact illegal miners who could not declare their activity, without saying that they were not really students or unemployed. In fact, all male villagers regardless of occupation, engaged occasionally with digging for gold. Food sellers and market women in fact sold their goods to these miners, both locals and outsiders. It was also many of them who went to the Churches to ask from God for a miracle: that is, to help them to strike gold while digging the next day.

6. Conclusion

The question is whether the situation in Ghana which I attempted to describe in this paper falls into the “market versus society” schema. Although the entire region has been subjected to the global market as a whole, already from the pre-colonial period, I wish to stress that exactly this subjection blocked the development of both a domestic free market and an integrated “society” in Ghana. Ghana may well be a state, but it is not really a nation and it is not also “a” society. The attempt for forming a society is constantly met by a permanent failure. Why does this happen? There may be many theories here of course. My theory is the following:

Global capitalist markets and western modern consumer societies, in order to survive and grow, need entire geographical zones of resources and labour which are neither markets, nor societies. I will give you an example for that: The gold-mine multinational which operates in my fieldwork-village, bribes the government and leases the land for peanuts. Even these peanuts, though, go to the government pockets and not to the local people. Local people work in the mines for 1.5 euro per day. At the same time deregulation of protective legislation for the forest, allows the company to expand and lease more and more land. When the company transfers the gold to Europe, America or Australia, though, this gold creates an economic circle. It pays taxes, it creates jobs, it gives work to goldsmiths, generates consumption, production, social and economic growth.

Therefore the no-market and no-society condition in Ghana supports the market *and* society in the advanced capitalist countries. This is the reason why I think that the real antithesis which penetrates the contemporary neo-liberal world-system is not the antithesis between the market and society, rather the antithesis between capitalism and consumer-western society on one side and humanity on the other.

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