

In response to the “wind of change”: The statecraft of Kwame Nkrumah

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During the first ever tour of Commonwealth countries in Africa, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made his first stopover in Ghana on 5 January 1960.

On 9 January, Macmillan, at a State Dinner organised on his behalf in Accra, made a momentous speech. A speech that is regarded as a rehearsal of a key British foreign policy statement Macmillan was to make a month later in Cape Town. This speech would later be referred to as the “wind of change” speech.

The South African version of Macmillan’s speech was delivered on 3 February in Parliament in Cape Town. The Cape Town version completed Macmillan’s key rhetorical invention which expressed a new paradigm of Britain’s foreign policy in Africa. In the end, the speech resonated differently in the two countries where it was heard, for obvious reasons. That is, there were significant differences between the political contexts in Accra and Cape Town, rendering the speech rhetorically significant in terms of its effects and responses, both immediately and later.

By the year 1960 when the British Prime Minister visited Ghana, it had been independent for three years and was already a proud member of the British Commonwealth. Ghana was on the verge of attaining a republican status. As short a time as it was after independence, Nkrumah was in full gear marshalling resources to help eliminate colonialism in other African territories. It was within this positive political atmosphere that Macmillan’s address was received. Macmillan’s address in Accra was, in essence, in line with Ghana’s new political direction which had been set in motion by Kwame Nkrumah. In his Accra speech, Macmillan carefully stated that:

The wind of change is blowing right through Africa. This rapid emergence of the countries of Africa gives the continent a new importance in the world.¹

On the other hand, Prime Minister Verwoerd of the Union of South Africa was strengthening his hand in apartheid and was on the verge of pulling the country out of the Commonwealth. Macmillan was scheduled to give three speeches in South Africa.² The climax of the three was to be his address to the South African Parliament in Cape

¹ This excerpt cited by Hunt is found in Colin Baker, “Macmillan’s ‘wind of change’ tour, 1960”, in *South African Historical Journal* 38, 1 (1998): 181. The full version of Macmillan’s speech delivered in Accra could not be located by the author. However, various sources agree that the version of the speech which was delivered in Accra was slightly changed to be delivered in Cape Town.

² *Ibid.* 178.

Town. In this speech, Macmillan hit on the most key message at the heart of his African tour. He noted:

The wind of change is blowing through this continent and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. And we must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it.³

Macmillan's 'bombshell' speech in Cape Town Parliament seemed rhetorically inflicting on the sensibilities of the South African government. It called for a deep reflection and overhaul of the Union government's racial policies. The setting – the South African Parliament – could not have been more appropriate for such a key deliberative invention.

Though both Prime Ministers Nkrumah and Verwoerd responded immediately to Macmillan's surprise in both Accra and Cape Town as custom demanded of them, such immediate responses can seldom ever articulate clearly the most desired responses to the exigencies that would have been created by a key speech such as Macmillan's. By the end of the Cape Town address, Nkrumah had conceived clearly the full spectrum of Macmillan's message in Africa. While Accra's address had seemed to be a rehearsal, the Cape Town delivery became the real performance which completed Macmillan's message to Africa. Be that as it may, Nkrumah gave two key responses. The first speech was delivered at the dinner in Accra; the other, eight months later in New York. My concern in this essay is to examine Nkrumah's craft in responding to Macmillan's central message. By this, I will explain the speech's articulation of a single policy direction between Ghana and Britain on one hand and their points of departure on the other hand. I will examine Macmillan's central metaphor and its application of indirect reference as a form of diplomatic rhetoric. Lastly, I will analyse how Nkrumah employed Macmillan's central message as an appropriate medium for his own argumentation at the United Nations General Assembly, and by so doing served as a means of strengthening Macmillan's message.

The metaphor: "wind of change"

To appreciate Nkrumah's craft as a response to Macmillan's momentous African policy statement, we need to understand the "wind of change" metaphor as a rhetorical commonplace of Macmillan's address. We need to locate its locus in the two speeches (Accra and Cape Town) in order to assess the quintessential nature of Nkrumah's rhetorical choices in his response, both immediately and later. Colin Baker in his work explicates the conception, preparation and execution of Macmillan's 1960 African tour. The tour was to cover strategic British interests bordering on Commonwealth and

³ See the original full speech in Harold Macmillan "The wind of change", in Philippe-Joseph Salazar, ed., *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 2, 3 (2011): 28-38.

colonial related issues.⁴ With the changing face of Britain's policy in Africa, Macmillan wanted to use the tour to state this new policy direction. Amongst the numerous considerations for the order of the visit, Ghana had been chosen for the grand opening of the tour with the Union of South Africa as the climax and as Baker notes, the speech that the Prime Minister was to deliver in Cape Town was "intended to be the most important of the four major speeches of the tour".⁵ The decision to use the phrase 'the wind of change' in Accra, according to David Hunt, was to "assure the Ghanaians that Britain was well aware that numerous changes were taking place in Africa and that far from opposing them, they intended to foster and 'direct them towards useful purposes.'"⁶ This choice of phrase seemed rhetorically appropriate for Macmillan's address in that, Ghana had not only become the first Sub-Saharan African territory to claim its independence, but by 1960, it had become the avant garde of nationalism in Africa.

It is important to know that initially, the focal phrase "the wind of change" had been destined to appear only in the Accra speech. However, it got the chance for a second life by being repeated in the Cape Town Parliamentary speech when Hunt decided to include the phrase. Hunt, who contributed in the drafting of Macmillan's address, remarks that, "as nobody had paid any attention to the phrase in Accra I thought I might as well use it again and ... put it in with only minor variations".⁷ By this destined repetition of the phrase in Cape Town, it became the rhetorical hinge upon which the locus of Macmillan's African policy statement came to rest. In other words, it had summed up the totality of the British Prime Minister's message, bringing forth an exigency which called for a crucial response.

It is within this rhetorical context of the significance of the "the wind of change" that Nkrumah invented a climactic response seven months later at the United Nations (UN) on 23 September 1960. But examining what constituted Nkrumah's response at the UN, we can first take a glance at his immediate response to the "wind of change" as it was first heard in Accra.

We are together but uncommitted

In Accra, Kwame Nkrumah did not hesitate to lay emphasis on Ghana's foreign policy to Macmillan, a foreign policy which he had carefully explicated in his Independence Declaration Speech three year earlier to the world.⁸ The visit of the British Prime

⁴ Macmillan's tour was to cover Ghana, the Union of South Africa, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Kenya and Nigeria. Kenya was later cancelled from the list. See Baker, *South African Historical Journal*, 174.

⁵ *Ibid.* 177.

⁶ *Ibid.* 177.

⁷ *Ibid.* 181. Hunt's remark is captured by Baker.

⁸ See E. Powell, *Private Secretary (female)/Gold Coast* (London: Hurst, 1984): 107-109.

Minister gave a platform for Nkrumah's reiteration of Ghana's unequivocal anti-colonial foreign policy in Africa. In view of this, Britain's changing policy in Africa was surprising news to Nkrumah as this brought about somehow strangely, a convergence of African foreign policies between Britain and Ghana, a former colonial master and its former colony. As Nkrumah gave his initial response to Macmillan's address, he clearly gave recognition to this convergence in Accra. The speeches of the two Prime Ministers are considered in Nkrumah's words, as the creation of a new foreign policy pact which places both Ghana and Britain on the same plane. It was welcome news to Nkrumah to see Britain, upon reflection, to have decided to stand up and pursue a new moral cause in Africa. Nkrumah noted:

We appreciate that the United Kingdom, which is heavily involved in Africa, is faced with very weighty problems in the discharge of her obligations in this Continent. We sincerely hope that it is recognised that Ghana which has been in the vanguard of the freedom movement is also faced with equally great problems. I am glad to observe that the United Kingdom has been among the first to show favourable reactions to the call of independence. We, hope sincerely, therefore, that it will be possible, within the Commonwealth context, to formulate policies and programmes within which our two countries can work together.⁹

Nkrumah's well-crafted remark cast Macmillan's speech within a certain rhetorical light: that Britain had come to see the light and now it (Britain) does not share the same moral principles with other Western Powers that still possess colonies in Africa. Nkrumah, holding a moral code, had endorsed Britain as an epitome of what a World power should be. In an epideictic stance, he was "promoting values that are shared in the community".¹⁰ He therefore hailed the Commonwealth as a representation of the new moral forces which, Britain, a former colonial power represented. In praising Britain, this is what Nkrumah said about the Commonwealth:

Your visit thus dramatically reflects the growth and constant change of that remarkable institution, composed as it is of old countries and new countries, but all of them dedicated to the same principles of human dignity, and political freedom. Naturally we in Ghana think of the Commonwealth in its present form.¹¹

The epideictic tone of Nkrumah's speech placed Macmillan's new foreign policy direction in Africa on a high moral plane – a moral plane which has the potential to influence other world powers to take a second look at their own positions in Africa. Macmillan's speech had given Nkrumah the opportunity to establish and declare Britain as a firm and trusted partner for the sole cause of ensuring freedom in every part of Africa. The "wind of change", both in terms of Macmillan's speech and nationalism in Africa, had begun in Ghana and Nkrumah was poised to blow it, with Britain's rhetorical backing, throughout Africa.

⁹ K. Nkrumah, "The African hurricane", in Samuel Obeng, ed., *Selected speeches of Kwame Nkrumah Vol. 1* (Accra: Afram Pub. Ltd, 1997): 14.

¹⁰ See Perelman's discussion of the speaker and epideictic speech in C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts - Tyteca, *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation*, J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver, trans. (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1969): 52.

¹¹ Nkrumah, *Selected speeches*, 15.

But beyond the common call between Nkrumah and Macmillan to pursue freedom in Africa, Nkrumah did not hide Ghana's neutral position in the Cold War. Thus as long as Macmillan was engaged in the decolonisation of Africa, Nkrumah presented himself in his response as an ally but would not extend the same level of cooperation in support of Western ideological position in relation to the Cold War. Through Nkrumah's craft, he had been able to establish a cooperative positive on one hand with Britain and on the other hand, a non-committal approach to ideological inclination in relation to the Cold War. Through his statecraft he had demonstrated carefully the boundaries of his commitment and neutrality to two key international situations (anti-colonialism and the cold war) whose pursuit, albeit with different approaches, is crucial to ensuring peaceful co-existence within the comity of nations. He noted in the peroration that:

Again, we have declared our stand in international relations: Ours is one of positive non-alignment... Our neutral position is thus intended to enable us not only to steer a middle course but positively to influence and sponsor whichever cause will ensure the peace of the world.¹²

The non-aligned position which had been taken by Nkrumah was of grave concern to Macmillan. A concern which he would express deeply in his address in Cape Town. Part of Macmillan speech in Cape Town subtly betrays Britain's policy of decolonising Africa – that newly independent African territories may be drawn into the ideological net of the West.¹³ Nkrumah was ready for Western collaborators in decolonising Africa but not to use their assistance as bait for Africans to embrace Western ideological trapping. Nkrumah's position of Ghana's neutrality expresses the firmness of his ability to craft a neutral ideological position in order to steer a middle course. Thus, with Nkrumah's speech in Accra, he had concluded, what I refer to as, his introductory remarks to his rhetorical response to Macmillan's initial address in Accra. Upon listening to the complete address of Macmillan in Cape Town, Nkrumah waited for the right opportunity to craft a suitable response to Macmillan's "wind of change". That opportune moment was to come seven months later at the 15th Session of the UN General Assembly.

Sailing on the wind of change

In his UN address, Nkrumah crafted a speech which explicated the "wind of change" metaphor. By September, this important phrase of Macmillan's had gained maturity in view of key political developments in Africa. There was political strife in the Congo involving the Belgians, France was at war in Algeria, and racial political unrest was rising in the Union of South Africa, especially after the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960. In addition to these incidents, as many as fourteen African countries had gained

¹² *Ibid.* 15-16.

¹³ See Macmillan's speech, "wind of Change", 32.

their independence between the time of Macmillan's speech in Cape Town and Nkrumah's address at the UN. This was within a record time of eight months. Africa, in view of these fascinating political developments, was continuously making news in the international media. In fact, to the international community, Macmillan's "wind of change" could not have been more meaningful. The phrase, to a large extent, had gained political currency and was evocative of what was happening within the remaining colonies in Africa. In the introductory statement of his address, Nkrumah indirectly evoked the words of Macmillan by stating:

One cardinal fact of our time is the momentous impact of Africa's awakening upon the modern world. The flowing tide of African nationalism sweeps everything before it and constitutes a challenge to the colonial powers to make a just restitution for the years of injustice and crime committed against our continent.¹⁴

The statement produces a complex symbolic liaison¹⁵ by ensuring a confluence of Macmillan's position and that of Pan-Africanism as advocated by Padmore. While our current focus is not on Pan-Africanism, pointing to it is relevant as it primarily underpins Nkrumah's statecraft. In this liaison, "Africa's awakening" expresses Nkrumah's known position whilst the phrase "flowing tide of African nationalism" brings Macmillan's words forcefully into the centre of the current argument of Nkrumah's speech. Nkrumah's remarks reiterated the new sense of cooperation between Africa and Britain, a key Western Power. The evocation of Macmillan's words is to give legitimacy to the moral arguments which Nkrumah pursued as he discussed the African situation. Nkrumah crafted his UN address in a manner in order to remain close to Macmillan's message whilst at the same time keeping Macmillan's authority at the centre of his arguments. With such a strategy, the argument which Nkrumah presents will be perceived not only through its logical appeal but also through the attractiveness of Macmillan's position which had already been received favourably by the international community.

While Nkrumah wanted to tailor his UN invention closely to Macmillan's, he also wanted to invoke it albeit with a new level of effect. Though Macmillan had in his address presented a picture of the growing nationalism of Africans with stupendous invention, Nkrumah deliberately crafted his speech to slap on Macmillan's invention another layer of effect. He remarked:

The wind blowing in Africa is not an ordinary wind, it is a raging hurricane and it is impossible for... any other colonial power, to prevent the raging hurricane of African nationalism from blowing through the oppressed and down-trodden colonies.¹⁶

Instead of a "wind of change", Nkrumah rather presented his audience with "a raging hurricane" as a means of deepening Macmillan's metaphor in order to create a new

¹⁴ Nkrumah, *Selected speeches*, 156.

¹⁵ I apply Barbara Warnick's application of the term in her "Argument schemes and the construction of social reality: John F. Kennedy's address to the Houston Ministerial Association", in *Communication Quarterly* 44, 2 (1996): 190.

¹⁶ Nkrumah, *Selected speeches*, 167.

intensity of rhetorical effect on the audience. As Perelman notes “even the words of other people, when repeated by a speaker, have changed their meaning, for in the process of repetition he always adopts toward them a position that is in some way new, even if only in the degree of importance he attaches to them”.¹⁷ In effect, Nkrumah had transformed the meaning of Macmillan’s phrase. In other words, he had showed himself influential in the unfolding drama of nationalism in Africa as an insider and also an architect of the movement. The stark evidence of over a dozen independent countries within a period of eight months only lends credence to Nkrumah’s justification in intensifying Macmillan’s metaphor as “a raging hurricane”. Through a careful crafting of his delivery, Nkrumah did not only ride on the sail of the “wind of change” but appropriated it unto himself whilst at the same time giving it a new meaning in New York.

The rhetorical examples

Another key part of Nkrumah’s statecraft at the UN was his ability to construct clearly rhetorical examples in his address as a means of delineating Macmillan’s “wind of change”. By so doing, Nkrumah provides, dare I say it, the real evidence to the Macmillan invention. In his preparation to visit the Union of South Africa, Macmillan was a bit sceptical of Dr Verwoerd’s willingness to welcome him in South Africa.¹⁸ When the green light was finally given for the visit, Macmillan’s next worry was how to craft the most appropriate message to be delivered in the South African Parliament. This necessitated high-level consultations involving Sir John Maud, the British High Commissioner in Pretoria. Maud had the knack of giving well received speeches in the Union and therefore had to travel to London to meet Macmillan to discuss every detail of the speech.¹⁹

With this background to the Cape Town speech, it is logical to infer that Macmillan, though with a clear goal for his speech, was very concerned with the reception and impact of his address by the South African government. He needed to be tactful in his approach and tread cautiously to avoid hitting on any wrong emotional chords in view of the seemingly sensitive nature of the subject of his address. Though the successful impact of the Cape Town speech could be clearly assessed on the basis of hindsight, Macmillan, though forceful in his words, resorted mainly to indirect references in stating his argument about the political situation within the Union of South Africa. Raising the delicate subject of the rising political consciousness of black people in the Union of South Africa, Macmillan intoned, “as I’ve travelled around the Union I have found everywhere, as I expected, a deep preoccupation with what is

¹⁷ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, “The new rhetoric”, 317.

¹⁸ Baker, 174.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 177.

happening in the rest of the African continent".²⁰ He carefully did not state in direct terms to the Union Government what seemed to be the obvious. In another instance, he attempted to route his argument of injustice of the apartheid system through Christian morality. He noted:

Our judgment of right and wrong and of justice is rooted in the same soil as yours – in Christianity and in the rule of law as the basis of a free society. This experience of our own explains why it has been our aim in the countries for which we have borne responsibility, not only to raise the material standards of life, but to create a society that respects the rights of individuals, a society in which men are given the opportunity to grow to their full stature – and that must in our view include the opportunity of an increasing share in political power and responsibility.²¹

It is obvious that at the end of the delivery Macmillan had clearly stated his point but in as much as he yearned to make an impact, he needed to broach the subject of his address with the utmost caution, which he did, in order not to drive the Union Government out of the Commonwealth. Within the given circumstances in Cape Town, Macmillan had pushed his central message to the utmost limits with his rhetorical diplomatic arsenal. But in New York, Nkrumah's invention, to a large extent, provided some flesh to Macmillan's address, stripped his (Nkrumah) verbal attacks of all mild diplomatic strings and unleashed its venom into the heart of the apartheid government. After discussing the precarious situation of the Congo, Nkrumah noted:

I now turn to the Union of South African itself. The Union Government, against all moral considerations and against every concept of human dignity, self-respect and decency has established a policy of racial discrimination and persecution which in its essential inhumanity surpassed even the brutality of the Nazis against the Jews.²²

Whilst Macmillan had pointed in a mild seemingly diplomatic tone the problematic situation of apartheid, Nkrumah had rather gone in with an attack. He had continued to talk about the Sharpeville massacre which he had described vividly as "the gruesome massacre of defenceless men, women and children".²³ As I have already indicated, Macmillan diplomatically chose not to state the obvious as regards nationalist movements all over Africa, but Nkrumah in his speech furnished the audience with vivid images of what was happening in Africa. Aside from the description of the South African situation, the speech cited the Congo being "machine-gunned from the air by Belgian Military Aircraft and shell[ing] from the sea"²⁴ and in talking about war in Algeria, he notes how "for more than six years the sands of Algeria have been stained red with blood."²⁵ In effect, Nkrumah's address sought to expand Macmillan's arguments and provided the actual rhetorical examples which due to Macmillan's deliberate rhetorical choice of indirect reference were conspicuously omitted in the

²⁰ Macmillan, "wind of change", 31.

²¹ *Ibid.* 33.

²² Nkrumah, *Selected speeches*, 165.

²³ *Ibid.* 166.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 159.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 167.

Cape Town address. Nkrumah had responded to Macmillan's "wind of change" by giving it the needed rhetorical force in New York.

As Nkrumah provided vivid images to buttress his argumentation, it is interesting to note that Nkrumah turned a blind eye on what was happening in yet-to-be independent colonies still under the control of the British Empire. Whilst this seeming silence of the speech is baffling, its justification could perhaps emerge from the goodwill which Macmillan had already expressed clearly as Britain had begun a new moral journey in Africa. Since there was congruity in Britain and Ghana's foreign policies in Africa, Nkrumah's silence on British colonial holdings in Africa was a deliberate rhetorical choice. It was a demonstration of Nkrumah's trust in a new ally working to decolonise Africa. So as Nkrumah had promised friendship to Britain in Accra, he did indeed demonstrate it in New York, using his speech not only as a medium to provide solid evidence to Macmillan's "wind of change" but in a subtle means providing solid defence for the former Colonial Master.

The success of Nkrumah's delivery at the UN arguably is premised on the impact of Macmillan's "wind of change". On the heels of Macmillan's speech, Nkrumah had crafted an address the impact of which will become an extension of Macmillan's speeches in Africa. Through Nkrumah's response, he had joined Britain as an ally for the singular purpose of fighting colonialism in Africa whilst at the same time he argued for a neutral position in the conflict between the Eastern and Western blocs of the world.

Through a careful rhetorical craft, Nkrumah had used vivid images as rhetorical sources of evidence to the central issue, which out of careful diplomacy, Macmillan referred to indirectly. All in all, Nkrumah's response to the "wind of change" was a timely rhetorical intervention. By speaking on the heels of the "wind of change", Nkrumah successfully added a layer of rhetorical proof to Macmillan's invention, therefore forcing the major powers to critically deliberate on colonialism in Africa.

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