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**Exploring the Role of Trade and Migrations in Nigeria-Ghana
Relations in the Pre-Colonial and Colonial Periods**

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Abstract

Long before Ghana and Nigeria became independent countries in 1957 and 1960 respectively, peoples of both countries have had rewarding contacts. These involved inter-group relations in the political, economic, religious, cultural, administrative and recreational fields of human endeavour. Of these facilitators of inter-group relations, the two most outstanding elements that defined their relations before and during the colonial period were trade and migrations. The basic theme of this paper is therefore to document the nature and form of this trade network facilitated largely by the Hausa's and Yoruba's of Nigeria and the Akan peoples of the Gold Coast during the period of this study; and how the booming trade contact and colonial economic policy motivated great inter-state migrations between the two countries during the colonial period. The paper further explores the various motivations for inter-state migrations between the two countries in the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

Key words: Trade, Migration, Intergroup relations, Nigeria, Gold Coast

Introduction

Research has shown that the peoples who inhabit the present-day Nigeria and Ghana (formerly Gold Coast) have been involved in close inter-group relations with each other from time immemorial prior to the advent of colonial rule in Africa (Baker & Akin-Aina, 1995; Shack & Skinner, 1979; Adepoju, 1995:37-41). Such relations were occasioned largely by trade, migrations and cultural mix among the various peoples of both countries.

Trade Relations between Nigeria and the Gold Coast in the Pre-colonial Period

Perhaps, the first basis of relations between the peoples of Gold Coast (as Ghana was known before independence in 1957) and Nigeria in the pre-colonial era was trade. Boahen, (1975:4) and Newbury (1971:254) report that there was a prosperous gold and *Gbanja* kolanuts (*kola nitida*) trade between Kano in Northern Nigeria and Salaga, in the Southern forest region of Ghana during the trans-Saharan trade period. Lovejoy (1974:566) corroborates Boahen's submission, stating that the Kano-Old Oyo-Gonja trade route was very famous for *Gbanja* trade during the period. Then, slaves were used to transport the *kolanitida* from Gonja through Old Oyo to Kano. As Mabogunje (1972:41) rightly observes, "the ecological diversity of the Northern and Southern regions of West Africa accounted for specialization in crop production and mineral extraction which necessitated regional mobility for the purpose of commodity exchange." This need to exchange products of the different ecological areas of West Africa led to trade in commodities which sustained the famous Trans-Saharan trade. According to Wolfson (1958:18), trading activities along the Trans-Saharan trade routes stimulated large flows of traders from neighbouring territories who brought various goods such as ivory, *Gbanja* kolanut, gold, cattle, sheep, hides and skin of wild animals and clothes for sales at the Salaga markets. By the mid-16th century, Wangara traders were reported to be exporting gold extracted from the forest regions of the Gold Coast via Begho to Kano in exchange for salt, swords, iron and horses. (Boahen, 1975:4; Macdonall, 1902:420 and Olaniyi, 2005:307).

The Portuguese, who had been along the coast of West Africa since the 1460s, also gave impetus to the gold trade in West Africa as they supplied the Akan people of Ghana with numerous enslaved people from the Nigerian region in the early 1500s who were used to expand gold production by developing deep-level mining in addition to panning alluvial soils (Macdonall, 1902:420). Slave labour was also employed by the Akan for kolanut production around the same time. Slaves were used in transporting the *Gbanja* kolanut produced in Gonja to Kano where Kolanut was a popular stimulant (Lovejoy, 1980:16; Macdonall, 1902:420). That was the genesis of the booming kolanut trade between the Akan peoples of the Ashanti region of Ghana and peoples of Kano in northern Nigeria before the colonial era. This was

the antecedent of notable kolanut merchants among the peasants in Kano including Alhaji Alhassan Dantata (1877 – 1955) who was regarded as the wealthiest man in West Africa at the time of his death.(Price,2010; Dan-Asabe, 2000). Dantata was reported to have used steamships to transport kolanut between Accra and Lagos and later diversified his trade into items such as beads and necklaces.(ibid). Price and Dan-Asabe (2000) reported further that apart from Alhassan Dantata, other notable kolanut traders from Kano also included Umaru Sharubutu Koki and Maikano Agogo, all of whom, including Dantata, invested heavily in the Bank of British West Africa when its branch was opened at Kano in 1929.

Kano leather products (sandals) and tanned hides and skin were also exported for sale at Salaga and Kumasi markets beginning from the late 19th Century (Olaniyi, 2005:307; Ade-Ajayi & Crowder, 1987; Lovejoy, 1978:341-368). Around the same time, country cloths and elephant tusks obtained from Benin were sold to the Portuguese traders who in turn sold them to the Gold Coast. These clothes and shoes were used by the farm and mine workers in the Gold Coast because of their durability (Hodgkins, 1960:40; Johnson, 1976:95-117; Newbury, 1981:68). Numerous commodity markets and trade routes were equally established across the length and breadth of Ghana during the trans-Saharan trade era. They included the Kumasi, Yendi and the Salaga markets (Newbury, 1981:67; Perbi, 2001:2; Austin, 2004:16). Traders from within and outside West and North Africa brought goods to these Ghanaian markets. It was as a result of this that Hausa traders from Northern Nigeria brought slaves, livestock, cotton, cowries shell, copper, brassware, carpets, silks leather and iron pots among others for sale at the Salaga market.(Newbury, 1981:67; Olaniyi, 2005:307).

Aside from the gold, kolanut and leather trades linking the Kano and Ashanti merchants in the course of the Trans-Saharan trade, the Sokoto Caliphate, with Kano as the commercial centre, also provided the major market for salt from its immediate neighbours, Borno and from the adjacent Sahelian and desert region generally. As Lovejoy (1986:62) has aptly demonstrated, several thousands of tons of salt were imported yearly to the central emirates of the Caliphate (Katsina, Kano and Zaria) on the eve of its conquest by the British in 1903. To the distant southwest, the forest state of Ashanti in the Gold Coast also benefitted from the growing purchasing power within the Caliphate as the increased profit from the salt trade enabled Kano people to increase their effective demand for kolanuts (Lovejoy, 1980:32).

Such contacts necessitated what may be referred to as international migration today between Nigeria and the then Gold Coast. For instance, Clapperton (1929:10) describe the presence of a caravan consisting of upward of 1000 men and women and numerous beasts of burden on their way back to Hausaland after a long trading trip to Gonja and Ashanti regions in the Gold Coast. Cohen (1971:266-281) and Meillassoux

(1971:81) also affirmed the large flow of trading parties of Nigerians during the period of the trans-Saharan trade especially from Hausa land and Borno into other parts of West Africa. Brydon (1985:561-85) and Anarfi et al (2000:110) reports further that the caravan trade between Kano and the Ashanti region of Ghana became very prominent from about 1450AD during the reign of one Yakubu. In a similar vein, Smith (1970:516) also recounts how merchants from Givamje in the Gold Coast came to Kano and Katsina around 1360 for trading activities, some of them eventually making Katsina their place of abode. In this Givamje-Katsina trade network, the major items of trade were gold dust, ostrich feather, and kolanut from the Gold Coast, millet and salt from Katsina (Ibid).

Available facts, as contained in the foregoing discussions, point to the fact that more than any other groups, the Hausas of Nigeria and the Akan people of the Gold Coast were instrumental to the development of the kolanut, gold, leather and salt trades between the Gold Coast and Nigeria. Apart from promoting intergroup relations between the peoples of the two countries, it also ensured that many Nigerians of Northern Nigeria descent were well established as settlers in the Gold Coast at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Sooner than later, as shall be pointed out later in this paper, many other Nigerian ethnic groups especially the Yoruba from South- Western Nigeria joined in this rush to the Gold Coast especially as itinerant labourers, mine workers, petty traders, farm labourers and other menial jobs. The population of Nigerians in the Gold Coast became so large that by the second quarter of the twentieth century, Nigerians were reported to have constituted the largest single group among the subjects of other British West African colonies resident in the Gold Coast (Cardinall, 1931:8). The period of colonial rule however witnessed a larger influx of Nigerians into the Gold Coast than Gold Coasters to Nigeria.

Inter-territorial Migrations between Nigeria and the Gold Coast in the Colonial Era: The Motivating Factors

Migration researches (Anarfi, 2000:110; Baker & Akin-Aina, 1995; Shack and E.P. Skinner, 1979; Adepoju, 1995:37-41; Sutton, 2010: 472-473; Peil, 1974:368) have revealed that the peoples of Nigeria and the Gold Coast had been engaged in cross-national migrations between the 1920s and 1950s. Though there is no accurate record of the total number of Nigerian migrants during the colonial era, Gold Coast's 1948 census estimates put the total number of Nigerians living in the country at 46,000, a number that later rose to over 100,000 in 1959 (Mberu, 2010). Though Nigeria/ Gold Coast migrations have been well documented, the factors underlying this migratory pattern have received little attention (Antwi-Bosiakoh, 2009:93-112). It is therefore considered highly imperative to attempt an in-depth analysis of the various economic, political and social factors that motivated such migrations in the colonial period.

Nigerians and Gold Coastlers were largely motivated to engage in cross-migration during the colonial era by economic factors. In the first instance, the expansion of cocoa farming and the systematic orientation of the colonial economy of the Gold Coast created a huge demand for labour which the indigenous people were unable to satisfy (Austin, 2012a:6; Clarence – Smith, 2000:238-239; Kyei, 2001:336 – 337; Austin, 2012b:10; Amanda Berlan, citing L.J. Satre, 2005:112). As a result, labourers were recruited from Nigeria, Togo, and Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) (Adepoju, 1995:91). The influx of migrant workers was so sporadic that as at 1956/57 planting season, hired labourers were reported to have doubled the number of local farm-owners (Austin, 2005:319-320; Sutton, 2010:472-473; Adomako-Sarfoh, 1974:145-147).

Another set of Nigerians were engaged in produce buying. An outstanding example was S.O. Akinwumi, a Nigerian migrant from Lagos. He was reported to be a very successful businessman in the Gold Coast between 1887 and 1912. Calus Von Brazi submits that Akinwumi promoted Ghanaian cocoa to be the premium quality with his specially branded “S.O.A.” grade that the British prided themselves in buying. His cocoa produce which was largely bought from cocoa farmers in Mongoose and Pakro districts earned him substantial wealth in Ghana (Von Brazi, 2009). Migrant labourers from the Gold Coast were also engaged in cocoa farming in Nigeria during the same period. They were found in locations such as Agbowo and Ijebu land in Ogun State; Ondo and Ile-Oluji in Ondo State; as well as Ilesa in Osun State (Berry, 1974:89). Similarly, between the late 1890s and 1920s, Gold Coast nationals were imported to work on Benin rubber plantations by John Dunlop, the tyre merchant, who was in search of raw materials for his industry. During the same period, one Babanboni of Iyin Ekiti was also reported to have imported Gold Coastlers into Ekiti land for rubber tapping. (Information obtained through field trip in Nigeria between 2012 and 2013). Some other Yoruba towns like Ifo, Shagamu, Ode-Remo, Ishara, Ishaga and Makun-Omi in Ogun State also played host to Ghanaian farmers engaged in the cultivation of and trade in *Gbanja* kolanut (*kolanitida*) beginning from around 1892 (Ujorha, 2012; Akran, 2011).

A good number of *Nigerians* were also engaged in the minerals extraction sector of the Gold Coast economy during the colonial era. Amin (1974), Stapleton (1959), Eades (1993:1), Afolayan (2011) Nyanne and Danso (2006:219), Ofosu-Mensah, (2011:70) and Aubynn (2006:229) report that waves of Nigerian migrants were attracted to the Gold Coast by gold, diamonds, bauxite and manganese mining beginning from the 1920s. A majority of these migrants who were predominantly unmarried young male adults came from Ogotun Ekiti, Inisa and Oyan in Western Nigeria (Stapleton, 1959:49)) Labour shortages especially in the supply of native labourers experienced in the mining sector between 1894 and 1910 accounted

for the influx of migrant workers into Gold Coast during the period.(Nyame & Grant,nd; Ababio,nd). According to Nyame and Grant (nd), this problem came about as a result of the fact that the Akan mine labourers resented underground work. Some believed that underground mining was associated with unfriendly spirits while others viewed underground mining as a low status, degrading activity associated with slaves and the less privileged. Other reasons cited was that the people complained that the wages paid to the unskilled labourers was too low just as the indigenes also complained of the arduous and dirty nature of tasks performed by underground mine workers. The shortage of labour in the mines industry was also worsened by the booming cocoa industry which offered better job opportunities with better pay for workers (Adepoju, 2005:24-54; Thomas, 1973:79-103).

In the light of these numerous challenges that faced the recruitment of unskilled mining workers from the local peoples of the Gold Coast, Szerezewski (1965:140) opined that the Ashanti Goldfields Company had no choice than to look for workers elsewhere. This necessitated the employment of migrant workers from neighbouring West African States of Nigeria, Togo, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Niger, Mali, and Liberia. While Nigerians were employed in the various mines at Konongo, Obuasi, Tarkwa, Nsuta, Bogoso and Prestea across the Gold Coast; some migrant labourers from the Gold Coast were simultaneously employed in the Nigerian coal mines in Enugu; silver and copper mines in Bukuru; as well as the tin ore mines in Jos where Emirate Councils were, during the Second World War, given specified qouta's of labourers for the mines. A majority of the recruited labourers were from various countries in West Africa, including Gold Coast, Benin and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso)(Dumett, 1998:46; Ayensu, 1998:4; Hilson, 2002:13-26).

Apart from employment in the mining sector, a substantial number of Nigerian migrants, especially the Yoruba and Hausa, were also engaged in petty trading (Mabogunje, 1972:41). Other people from Niger and Mali were self-employed traders rather than wage labourers (Eades, 1993: 107-139,196 &200; Brydon, 1985: 572; Peil, 974:368). Many of these traders successfully created flourishing enterprises in Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi, Bolga Tanga, Winneba, Fadama and a host of other towns in Ghana (Rouch, 1959:417-419). Apart from this, some Nigerian merchants also acted as middlemen between large firms and the Ghanaian consumers. They may be credited for facilitating the movement of goods from the urban to the remote areas of the Gold Coast through which they contributed immensely to economic development and transformation of rural communities in the Gold Coast (Gould, 1974:347-365; Stapleton, 1959:177; Skinner, 1963:.307-320). Ghanaian migrant traders from Gonja and Kumasi also created flourishing enterprises in Nigeria especially in *Gbanja* kolanut trade. They were located in places like Shagamu and Ifo in Yoruba land.

Another economic activity that engaged the attention of Nigerian migrants in the Gold Coast during the colonial era was timber work. As a way of diversifying the economic base of the Gold Coast economy, government took interest in the timber companies for the management of the forest resources as well as the log and timber products. Two major timber companies of those days were Mim Timber and Gliksten. Heavy export demands and development of new domestic wood-processing industries, apart from local demands for furniture and construction work, necessitated the expansion of the timber industry. But a major challenge confronted the expansion of the industry, namely, shortage of timber workers. As a way out of this predicament, the timber companies decided to offer higher pay to their workers more than farm laborers. As a result, the cocoa farmers started losing laborers to the timber industry. Adamako-Sarfoh (1974:147) reports that as at 1954, the timber companies employed between 1700 and 2000 workers, most of who were wage earners and were immigrants from some West African countries like Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

Nigerians were also employed as construction workers in Ghana between 1950 and 1960. (Oral interviews with some Ghanaians. These included: Mr. Clement Bruce of Yours and Ours Hostel, 23, Adamu Avenue, Adabraka, Accra, on 16 May, 2010 and Mr. Osei of Spotless Avenue, G.R.A Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria on 10 September, 2012). They were engaged in the construction of roads, rail lines, ports, forts and large warehouses. Most notable among these were the Tema and Takoradi deep water ports; and the roads and rail lines that connected Sekondi, Accra, Kumasi and later Tema in the 1960s. Others were the Akosombo Dam in the Volta Basin region and the Tema power plant (Arthur, 1991:71; Gyimah-Boadi & Asante, 2003, cited in Bump, 2006:16).

Another economic related factor that also instigated the movement of Nigerians to the Gold Coast during the same period was the economic differences between the Gold Coast and Nigeria in the colonial era. It was reported that from pre-colonial times up to the late 1960s, the Gold Coast enjoyed relative economic prosperity thereby making it the destinations of many migrants from neighbouring West African countries including Nigeria (Ibid). A higher wage rate in the Gold Coast in comparism to Nigeria during the colonial era and even in the immediate post-colonial era ensured greater chances of employment and commercial opportunities over there than could be obtained in Nigeria. For instance, reports had it that as at the 1930's, a gold miner in the Gold Coast earned about ten shillings compared to a paltry sum of two shillings and six pence earned by a tin miner in Nigeria (Anarfi, 2004:10). This wage differential served as magnet for many Nigerians to migrate to the Gold Coast's gold mines in the colonial period, to take advantage of the higher wages there.

Similarly, on the eve of Ghana's independence in 1957, her economy also appeared more stable and prosperous than that of Nigeria. The Gold Coast was the world's leading producer of cocoa. A crude monetary reflection of the development of cocoa was that the real value of Gold Coast's foreign trade multiplied tremendously between 1897 and 1938.(Aluko, 1976:47) Real wages increased in both the cocoa producing areas and in migrant communities that supplied labour to the cocoa industry (Austin, 2008: 587-624). It is on record that at independence in 1957, President Kwame Nkrumah sought to use the apparent stability of Ghanaian economy, insured largely by steady income from cocoa export, as a springboard for economic diversification and expansion. He therefore used cocoa revenues as collateral security for obtaining loans to establish import-substituting industries in Ghana as a way of conserving the country's foreign exchange earnings and reducing Ghana's economic vulnerability to world trade. Unfortunately, the price of cocoa collapsed in the mid-1960s, destroying the fundamental stability of the economy. Notwithstanding this ugly development, it has been established that up till the mid-1960, Ghana was undoubtedly richer than Nigeria and other West African countries. This was largely because Ghanaian gold and cocoa commanded high prices in the world market thereby yielding substantial foreign exchange earnings for Ghana. Usually in the 1930s through the 1950s, ordinary Gold Coast farmers reportedly lived a life of affluence, riding vehicles which were purportedly used by members of the political elite in Nigeria. It was an attempt to enjoy the Ghanaian economic boom that propelled the migration of a sizeable number of Nigerian able bodied men mostly from Inisa in present day Osun State, Ogbomoso, in Oyo State, Okemesi-Ekiti, and Ogotun Ekiti in Ekiti State to migrate to the Gold Coast. It became a rewarding venture for most of these migrants as they owned large cocoa farms that eventually transformed their economic (Moradi, 2008:107-1121; Bowden et al, 2008:1049-1079).

G.I Olomola also recounts vividly how some Nigerian citizens of Ekiti descent who were in financial dilemma usually ran to the Gold Coast to generate enough fund to offset their financial problems. Early in the 1930s, some Nigerians, especially from Okemesi- Ekiti migrated to evade the payment of tax introduced by the colonial government. Criminals who embezzled Native Authority funds in Nigeria also ran away to the Gold Coast to escape justice while some others who lost out in succession disputes often ran to the Gold Coast to avoid intimidation and persecution at home in Nigeria.(Information obtained from Prof. G.I. Olomola, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti between November 2009 and March 2010). This view was corroborated by some of my informants who said that they migrated to Ghana purposely to save themselves from recurring financial embarrassments they were facing as a result of their persistent inability to raise enough cash to meet personal and family needs.

Successful exploits of initial migrants also served as another major impetus for increased flows of Nigerians and Ghanaians. According to some of my informants at Offa, Ilesa, Kumasi and Accra; the apparent success displayed by returned emigrants in their flamboyant display of riches created long-lasting impressions in the minds of their relatives at home and went a long way to stimulate their own interest to emigrate. A good number of young adults were so motivated in the 1950s to move to Ghana in search of “easy” wealth from “abroad” which most people considered as more lasting than remaining at home (F. Komolafe, nd). It was for this reason that Mr. Sabitu Anigilaje, for instance, ventured into Kumasi with his uncle when he also expressed the desire to buy a bicycle for his father. Many other similar instances abound (Interview with Sabitu Anigilaje at Iwo, Osun State on 12 October, 2011).

An additional factor that also encouraged migration between Nigeria and the Gold Coast was improved and cheap means of transportation through road and water. The extension of road network within Gold Coast significantly decreased the cost of movement of migrants from one region of Gold Coast to the other and from other West African states into Gold Coast during the colonial rule. Cocoa growing in Gold Coast benefitted greatly from the mechanization of transport, not only through reduced transport costs, but also through the release of labour from head portage. The transport mechanization which began with the opening of railway lines linking the coast with the hinterland from 1902 onwards, continued with the adoption of motor lorries from the 1910s on an increasing array of lateral routes (Abdulai, 1999:61-74; Wrangham, 2004:1-18; Jedwab & Moradi, 2012; Ingham, 1981:3; Beals & Menezes, 1970:109 – 127). Furthermore, Aluko (1976:40) observes that the relative ease of east-west coastal communications between Accra and Lagos made it easy for the educated elite of both territories to meet regularly for consultation and cooperation. Ayandele (1970:12-13) substantiated Aluko’s assertion when he recalled how Dr. Edward Blyden, J.E. Casely Hayford and J.B. Horton were all able to travel across the four British West African colonies during the colonial period on the sea with relative ease. In short, transportation development facilitated labour migration by reducing the hazards of journeys that had hitherto hampered long distance migrations.

Some political factors also aided migration between Nigeria and Gold Coast. First was the liberal attitude of the colonial powers towards immigration of foreign African workers, which encouraged free movement of people and goods. This can be attributed to the fact that these migrants worked in such sectors as mining and export crop production, which benefitted the colonial powers, and hence, the *laissez faire* attitude towards immigration. Furthermore, free movement of people within West African colonies could also be attributed to the absence of legal requirements for travelling. It should be recalled that until about the 1960’s, no country in West Africa

enacted any regulations to control immigration except Cote d'Ivoire, in 1958 (Yaro, 2005:3; Adepoju, 2005:3).

In addition to the economic and political factors, social considerations were also affected decisions on migration. Specifically, family oriented issues were of potent factor in this regard. Traditionally, men migrated leaving behind their wives and children who may subsequently join them. Cases of entire family members emigrating at once were very rare and the general rule was for the men to leave first while women and children join up later depending on the condition of the place of abode (Adepoju, 1995:96). Where the feedback was favourable, it instigated an increase in the rate of migration or vice-versa. Kinship ties, friendship and shared community origins increased migration flows because they reduced the psychic and risk costs of emigration, making it a more attractive option. These network connections constituted valuable social capital that migrants drew upon to gain access to foreign employment and better wages and working conditions that may be obtainable in the proposed migration destination. Networks further facilitate migration by giving assistance before, during and after the migration, not only by giving information, but also by financing travel costs or helping to find housing or a job (Boyd, 1989:638-670; Ritchey, 1976: 363-404). Several historical studies of immigration have further confirmed that the concentration of particular nationality and ethnic groups in certain locations facilitated the migration of the same groups to such locations (Levy & Wadycki, 1973:198-205; Gurak & Caces, 1992: 150-176; Choldin, 1973: 163-176; Fawcett, 1989: 671-680). This immigrant multiplier effect where family members secured the entry of other family members was true of Nigerian and Ghanaian migrants. As a matter of fact, a majority of initial migrants were reportedly instrumental in motivating and arranging the migration of their siblings. A case study was that of Alhaji Amao Alata from Ogbomoso who went to Ghana, on the advice of his senior brother. It was his senior brother that even gave him money for travelling to join him in Gold Coast (Interview with some of his relatives at Ogbomoso on 21 October, 2011).

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been established that Nigeria-Ghana relations had its foundations firmly laid in the pre-colonial era through intergroup relations among the citizens of both territories. This was facilitated largely by trade at the initial stage, especially between Kano in Northern Nigeria and Salaga in the Ashanti region of the Gold Coast. Successes recorded in this trade network later stimulated further interactions among the nationals of both countries, particularly through inter-territorial migrations of citizens of both countries before and during the colonial period. It was noted that the liberal attitude of the colonial powers in British West Africa towards immigrant workers; which encouraged free movement of people across colonial boundaries, the

successful economic exploits of initial migrants; the social need to join husbands and family members; as well as the availability of cheap means of transportation between Nigeria and the Gold Coast, among others, stimulated an increased rate of cross-migration between the two colonial dependencies in the colonial period. Though all these pre-colonial and colonial interactions were not fully sustained in the post-independence period, they however formed a strong basis for Nigeria-Ghana diplomatic relations since independence.

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