

## Debates & Think Pieces

---

### Beyond his Place, Beyond his Time: Nkrumah's Heritage in the New Millennium\*

---

#### Introduction

The problems of a nation, even a small one, cannot all be solved in the life span of any one man, or even in any one generation. The problems of Africa belong to many generations of men. The mountains that loom so formidably today will be distant hillocks behind the generations of tomorrow. But overweening ambition to erect what they think will be their own immortal monuments drives some men in tempestuous haste to telescope all history into a lifetime, and they seek to destroy in the process all who will not submit to their imperious will. ...It is not given to man to make himself immortal. It will take more than a lifetime to build a united nation out of the states of Africa. The vision was seen years ago, in the darkest days of slavery. It has come nearer to reality since then; but it is not the Hitlers who build the things that endure (Busia 1962).

In his own place, in his own time, Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah woke up one dawn in a far away land, and discovered that he could not return home. For six years and more, he lived in exile, waiting, hoping that the people of Ghana would change their mind, that they would reclaim the vision of freedom and self-determination he had tried to inspire them to, and they would surely welcome him back. Somehow, we never did. His thoughts gathered into a lump in his throat and stayed there for so long that the lump became malignant and was later diagnosed as cancer of the throat. And he died, only for his body to be brought home to widespread mourning and a state burial still remembered as the most heavily attended in our history.

On the day of the great betrayal, the day Ghana repudiated her most precious gift of the twentieth century, not too long after the guns fell silent around Flag Staff House, the people poured out into the streets with wild jubilation, led by students and some faculty members of the University of Ghana, Legon, many of them wearing academic gowns and screaming

**Kofi Anyidoho**  
University of Ghana  
Legon

obscurities into the tropical heat. The demonstrations gave way to several weeks devoted to a series of brilliant lectures given at the Arts Centre in Accra under the title 'What Went Wrong'? It was at one of those lectures that a leaflet with the opening passage quoted above was given the widest possible circulation.

To some, it may seem odd to begin a lecture dedicated to Dr Kwame Nkrumah's heritage by citing at length words of apparent wisdom from Professor K.A. Busia, the man who led the last major opposition in parliament against Nkrumah and was eventually obliged to seek refuge in exile. It is however appropriate that we choose Busia's words as a relevant entry point into a reassessment of the significance of Nkrumah's heritage. The Busia passage comes from the concluding pages of *The Challenge of Africa*. This is a brief but significant work in which the one time professor of sociology draws on fundamental human values inherent in aspects of his native Akan culture as a basis for his critique of the intellectual foundations of the independence movement along lines advocated by Nkrumah. Busia is very careful not to mention Nkrumah, but his words of caution may very well be answering to Nkrumah's warning that his generation of African leaders and the people of Africa could not afford the luxury of waiting on 'the evolution of history. We must give History a revolutionary push'.

It is important that we pay attention to what has been called the Nkrumah vs. Danquah-Busia tradition in Ghanaian politics as first and foremost the product of two contending intellectual traditions. A closer look at the Busia quote above should reveal that the essential case be-

ing made is for an evolutionary approach to African political culture and African development. The final argument is that it is better to err on the side of caution than to stumble in pursuit of rapid progress. It is a call against Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party's favourite guiding principle of the African liberation struggle, captured in the slogan 'Self Government Now', also inscribed in his often cited declaration that 'We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquility'.

The claim has often been made that intellectually, Nkrumah was no match for the political figures who led the opposition against his ideas and his political agenda for Ghana and for Africa, in particular, Dr. J. B. Danquah and Dr. K. A. Busia. There is no doubt that these two major figures were among the best-educated and most articulate Ghanaian intellectuals of their time. Indeed, as demonstrated in their various writings, their studies had given them a deep knowledge of African history and cultural institutions. As a scholar, Danquah is still widely recognised for his classic work *Akan Doctrines of God*, among others. And it is generally acknowledged that it was from his research into ancient African history that he proposed the name Ghana for the Gold Coast as an independent state. As indicated above, Busia's *The Challenge of Africa*, brief as it is, may be considered a classic study in human values, a study directly based on insights provided by a close study of aspects of ancient Akan traditions, such as funeral rites and the belief systems on which the rites are based.

It goes without saying that Danquah, Busia and many others of their circle were beneficiaries of the finest Western-type of education available to a select group among the African elite, the kind of education generally associated with the Oxford-Cambridge tradition. It is not only privileged education, but also education for privileges. The Oxbridge model of edu-

cation is one that is best suited to the world view and aspirations of young men and women who have been brought up under conditions of social reality which teach them to believe that they are among the very best, and that they naturally deserve the best of what life has to offer. In short, they are entitled to reserved, perhaps ancestral seats, in the House of Lords, a safe distance from the House of Commons.

It is significant that even in the colonial dispensation, in spite of racial stereotyping, in spite of serious doubts about the intellectual capacity of people of 'the darker races', especially the African, it was not uncommon for Oxford and Cambridge to open their doors to carefully chosen young men of promise, who were expected to be groomed into potential candidates for eventual OBE's, cynically termed by some as 'Obedient Boys of the Empire'. Admittedly, the Oxbridge tradition has often turned out brilliant and 'rebellious' products, much to the annoyance of their mentors. On the whole, however, it was expected that the future of the empire would be safe in the hands of these young, even if somewhat inexperienced, potential OBEs.

It is important to note as well, that many members of this elite group did not owe their privileged status only to the benefits of their Oxbridge type of education. Many of them came from royal lineage or belonged to families that had established themselves as members of the professional elite or the merchant class within the colonial system. Often, it was this kind of background that provided the resources for an Oxbridge type of education. Both Dr Danquah and Dr Busia are of direct royal descent.

The British might not have been too worried about the prospects of handing the Gold Coast over to their carefully prepared surrogates, under a new and disguised kind of indirect rule. After all, hardly any of them would ever have dreamed of cutting off their imperial umbilical cord in haste and without proper consultations and necessary preconditions. Besides, they were always properly dressed in three piece suits for formal occasions, and the best among them spoke English with a flawless Oxbridge accent that must have put Daniel Jones to shame. The future of the empire would and should be safe in their hands, even under a so-called independent Gold Coast, call it Ghana or whatever.

In the meantime, J. B. Danquah, 'the doyen of Gold Coast politics', and his colleagues - among them William Ofori Atta, Edward Akuffo Addo, J. W. De Graft Johnson and V.B. Annan - continued to press for 'substantial changes to the constitution introduced in 1946', changes that would pave the way for them to assume the leadership mantle. 'They confidently expected that their education, their social standing, their background and their leadership qualities would make them natural heirs when the colonial government handed over power' (Rooney 2007:48). As noted by Kwame Arhin, 'Dr Danquah and his friends thought of the UGCC as a group for uniting and embracing all the chiefs and peoples of the Gold Coast for the purpose of asking for the permission to rule themselves 'within the shortest possible time'... They would negotiate with those authorities a slow but systematic grant of authority...' (Arhin 2000: 10). Arhin's observation coincides with that of June Milne who also notes that the other leaders of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) who were arrested and imprisoned with Nkrumah, following the 1948 riots 'made it clear that they regretted inviting him to become the general secretary of the UGCC, even blaming Ako Adjei for recommending him. They wanted to conduct the liberation struggle in an orderly manner, step by step, under conditions prescribed by the colonial government' (Milne 2000:42).

Unfortunately, this guy just showed up and proceeded to spoil everything. Legend has it that when he stepped off the boat in Takoradi 'his total possessions had been a couple of suits and a change of shirts, shoes, and underwear which he carried in a small suit-case' (Rooney 2007: 21). To the above list of possessions, we probably should add a few books and manuscripts, as well as his almost completed but long abandoned PhD thesis. He apparently had no particular residential address of his own in the metropolis to go to, and, after some two weeks of reunion with his mother in Tarkwa, was obliged to spend the next few years in accommodation provided by benefactors.

Kwame Nkrumah had left the Gold Coast eleven years earlier, in 1935, with the dream of pursuing higher education. Having failed the entrance examination for University of London, he went, instead and upon advice from Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, to the United States. He eventually

graduated from Lincoln University in 1939 with a BA in Economics and Sociology; top of his class from the Lincoln Theological Seminary in 1942 with a Bachelor of Theology; from the University of Pennsylvania, also in 1942, with an M.Sc in Education, and again from U-Penn with an M.A. in Philosophy in 1943. Back at Lincoln, in between increasing responsibilities and involvement in student political organisation, he signed up for the PhD in Philosophy. His doctoral thesis, titled 'Mind and Thought in Pre-literate Society: A Study in Ethno-philosophy with Special Reference to the Akan people of the Gold Coast', was eventually abandoned to enable him devote full attention to his new responsibilities as a key member of the fast-growing Pan-African movement. His relocation from the United States to the United Kingdom, to work as Joint Secretary to the all-important 1945 Pan-African Congress at Manchester, effectively brought to an end his quest for a doctoral degree. However, a copy of the uncompleted thesis available at the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum in Accra suggests that the work was all but finished.

It is important for us to note that in order to secure funding for his travel to America, he had to rely on support from members of his extended family. He even had to travel to Lagos as a stow-away in order to get help from one such family member. Even more significant, most of his education in the US was gained while he worked at various menial jobs to support himself: from library assistant to such 'sordid and degrading jobs' as 'selling fish in Harlem' and 'handling of rotting animal entrails'. 'Often, during these difficult days, he slept in railway stations until the police moved him on, he slept in parks until heavy rain forced him to move and he even slept on the subway between Harlem and Brooklyn' (Rooney 2007:29). A reading of 'Hard Times', Chapter Four of Nkrumah's autobiography (1957:35-47), offers ample testimony not only of the hardship he had to endure but also his determination to survive this long period of agony. Even more significant, was his determination to turn this period of adversity into an opportunity to learn new ways of survival, a chance to make new friends, take on new, even if difficult challenges. In the process, he gained a wide range of friends and experiences, all of which were to play a crucial role in his early maturity as an unstoppable fighter for freedom and social justice.

It was under these conditions that Kwame Nkrumah was to become a candidate for activist politics in the cause of the emancipation of Black people. The rising tide of Black nationalism, especially as championed by Marcus Mosiah Garvey, was clearly a natural destination for his political tutelage. In an important essay titled 'Kwame Nkrumah – the Pan-African Revolutionary', Kofi Awoonor makes a strong case for a direct link between Nkrumah's eventual political philosophy and agenda and the kind of drudgery he had to endure in the United States, especially as a Black person in those years of active political struggle against slavery, racism, and capitalism (Awoonor 1994:1-34).

The case being made here for the impact of Nkrumah's background of growing up in modest and sometimes humiliating circumstances as a working class 'black' person, must also take in one very important aspect of his place of origin. He was born into the small rural community of Nkroful in 1909. It was barely eight years after the European colonisers had set the boundary that split the ancestral territory of his Nzema people into two, one part to the British on the Gold Coast, the other half over to the French in the Ivory Coast. As a child, he must have grown up watching his people as they tried to adjust themselves to this sudden complication introduced into their lives by alien colonial powers. It is my view that the need for the removal of such colonial boundaries must have come to Nkrumah quite early in life. This view is expressed even more emphatically by Kwame Arhin: '... it is just possible that Nkrumah's intense Pan-Africanism is related to his early experiences connected with the practical results of the arbitrary division of the Anyi-Baule peoples between the British and French colonial powers along the Gold Coast and Ivory Coast boundaries' (Arhin 2000:3).

The leaders of the United Gold Coast Convention must have meant well when they accepted Ako Adjei's suggestion that Nkrumah should be invited to return to the Gold Coast as the first full time paid secretary of the party. As one historian puts it, 'They did not realise what a deep gulf separated their views and their aims from those of the revolutionary leader they were about to invite to join them' (Rooney 2007:48).

The story of Nkrumah's dissatisfaction with the basic ideas and programme of the UGCC, his eventual split and the

launching of his own Convention People's Party, is one story that has been told so often we need not go into it here. Instead, I would like to propose that the greatest mistake made by Danquah and his colleagues was not the invitation to Nkrumah. Their most fatal error was to have underestimated the force of the intellectual and revolutionary foundations of Nkrumah's political convictions and strategies. If they had, for instance, had a chance to read his completed but unpublished manuscript *Towards Colonial Freedom*, they might not necessarily have agreed with him on various points and conclusions. But they probably would at least have taken him a bit more seriously as a potentially dangerous opponent who deserved to be treated with respect, rather than with disdain. Their greatest error was to have seen him at first and perhaps for a long time as a mere rabble-rouser and troublemaker, a man with no real pedigree as an intellectual.

Nkrumah may have abandoned his doctoral studies. But he was no half-baked intellectual. He had read widely, gaining intellectual breadth and depth not only from Hegel, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mazzini, but also from some of the best minds working in the service of the Pan-African struggle in the earlier decades of the twentieth century. They included Du Bois, Kwegyir Aggrey, Nnamdi Azikiwe, CLR James, George Padmore, Casely Hayford, among others, and indeed Blyden and Horton of the 1860s to 1880s. Each one of these, in his own way, was an activist intellectual, a public intellectual totally devoted to the struggle for the emancipation of African people. The cumulative impact of these minds on Nkrumah seemed to have brought him to a clear conviction that it was not enough to be a brilliant intellectual. The ultimate goal of intellectual enterprise must be the ability to use insights provided by intellectual analysis as building blocks of strategies for the African liberation struggle. As noted by George Padmore:

During his twelve years' stay abroad, he had made an intensive study of the history of political and national liberation movements and had helped in formulating the tactics and strategy of the Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in October 1945, under the direction of Dr W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, the foremost Afro-American scholar and champion of Negro liberation, and one of the founders of

the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples (Padmore 1953:61).

Among these various influences, however, Nkrumah himself admits that his greatest debt was to the intellectual and revolutionary ideas and tactics of Marcus Garvey: '... of all the literature I studied, the book that did more than any other to fire my enthusiasm was *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* published in 1923' (Nkrumah 1957:44-45). Commenting on the Garvey influence on Nkrumah, Awoonor observes that 'It was also Garvey who led him to his Pan-Africanist idealism and practice, defining for him the existence of a global African family, including the concept of the diaspora ... which later became the cornerstone of his internationalism' (Awoonor op. cit:xi-xii). Nkrumah's eventual adoption of the Black Star, Black Star Line, and the national colours of red, gold and green bear ample testimony to the impact of Garveyism and the Garvey movement on his project for a self-defining African revolution. Lessons learned from the Garvey movement must have helped Nkrumah's remarkable success in leading the expansion of the base of the UGCC from one central committee and office to hundreds of branches and offices across the country in a relatively short time. Following his break with the UGCC and its leadership, the newly established Convention People's Party became the immediate beneficiary of the Garvey-inspired techniques and tactics of mass political mobilisation, complete with remarkable success in getting ordinary, even poor, citizens to provide much of the financial and other resources needed to sustain the movement and its campaigns.

As part of a recent graduate seminar on Post-colonial Literature, I had my students read *Towards Colonial Freedom* as a good example of what has been described as a discourse of decolonisation. From the long discussions that followed, it was clear to me that the students were amazed at the force and clarity with which Nkrumah's analysis exposes the ultimate goals of imperialism and various strategies designed for the achievement of those goals. They were also impressed by the carefully thought-through programme of action Nkrumah proposed for the struggle against imperialism and its offshoots, colonial and neo-colonial domination. Above all, however, some of the students expressed anxiety over his fu-

ture, his life. As one of them put it: 'Given the power of the forces Nkrumah was taking on so openly, how did he expect to be left alone to carry on with his plans?'

My answer was that, somehow, Nkrumah did not allow anxiety over his own life to stop him from doing what he believed was not only right but needed to be done. Again, somehow, the forces he was taking on so openly did move against him, but not fast enough. And in the little space he had, he was able to lead the world into directions that forever changed the political history of a whole continent and its extensions into the Diaspora.

But then, maybe, I am in danger here of exaggerating the impact of a single man on the course of the history of a whole people. It may be truer to argue, as CLR James has done, that the African world of the 1940s into the 1950s was more than ready to fly off in revolutionary directions. Nkrumah – with a few others of his generation – just happened to be the one who had enough courage and clarity of vision to give that world the long awaited 'revolutionary push':

The dozen years that have unfolded since the winning of independence by the Gold Coast in 1957 are some of the most far-reaching and politically intense that history has known. African state after state has gained political independence with a tumultuous rush that was not envisaged, even by the most sanguine of the early advocates of independence. The names of leaders obscure the political reality. What is to be noted is that Kenyatta, Nkrumah, Banda, to take the best-known names, were all imprisoned by the British Government and had to be released to head the independent states. The British Government, as did the French and Belgian, found that despite their soldiers, their guns and planes, they could not rule. The colonial mentality having been broken, the only way to restore some sort of order ... the only way to have a viable society was to transfer the man in jail to be the head of state (James 1969:114-115).

It has been customary for some time now, especially for a generation too young to have been personally touched by the events of that great moment in African and world history, to dismiss independence as a fluke, a mirage. Independence as a movement certainly has suffered se-

rious setbacks, but its general import must not be dismissed so lightly:

It tasted good. To the surging crowds at the Lagos racecourse, to the thousands who packed the polo grounds in Accra, to the multitudes that lined the streets of Nairobi, Kampala, Abidjan, Freetown, or Dar es Salaam, it tasted good indeed.

'It is the hour of truth', proclaimed President Senghor in Dakar.

'At long last, the battle has ended!' Kwame Nkrumah exulted, watching the red, green, and gold colors of Ghana fluttering in the night breeze, 'Ghana ...is free forever...'

Independence, however, carried more profound implications – more than an individual, or even a national triumph. Nkrumah's exultation was tempered by the knowledge that Ghana was an example for all the people of Africa. 'If we ... succeed', he informed his countrymen, 'we shall aid ... other territories ... the sooner to reach conditions under which they [too] may become independent'. Similarly, in Tanganyika, the great day was marked by the lighting of a beacon on the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, a flame to shine symbolically for all who sought freedom. Julius Nyerere had some years earlier given the explanation: 'We, the people of Tanganyika, would like to light a candle and put it on top of Mount Kilimanjaro which would shine beyond our borders, giving hope where there was despair, love where there was hate and dignity where before there was only humiliation. In Tanganyika, as elsewhere in Africa, independence meant more than freedom from colonial rule. It meant the freedom to build a new life, a better world' (July 1987:1-4).

What we may call the African independence imperative constitutes one of the most rapid and most hopeful, even if short-lived, moments in world history. Thirty African countries gained their political independence from reluctant but somewhat helpless European powers within five years from Ghana's historic moment on 6 March 1957. A large part of the credit must go to such visionary leaders as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Azikiwe, Kenyatta, even Banda, despite how each of them later turned out. But we cannot overlook the role played by the ordinary citizenry of the various countries. Without their support, without the sacrifices they were prepared to make, in some cases

sacrifice that took the form of armed struggle against some of the best equipped armies in Europe, often aided by deadly collaborators and traitors in their midst, the lofty ideals of even the most revolutionary, most visionary leader were bound to amount to nothing but a dream. In the particular case of Nkrumah, his official biographer makes the following observation: 'There was fertile ground on which to work for mass participation in the anti-colonial struggle. A high degree of political awareness already existed among the people in towns and countryside. This was being expressed in a growing resentment of colonial rule' (Milne 2000:36).

Perhaps this was the one thing that each of these leaders eventually seemed to have lost sight of – that the spirit of freedom resides in the collective will and struggle of a people, not in the lofty ideals of one leader, however gifted, however self-sacrificing. Any disconnect between the vision of a leader and the will and spirit of the people can only lead to one thing – collapse of the independence dream itself and tragedy for the leaders and the people alike.

For a few magical years, Nkrumah seemed to have carried the will and the spirit of the people with him. And during those few years, amazing progress was recorded, in spite of active and negative opposition and sometimes blatant sabotage and repeated attempts on his life.

The Convention People's Party (CPP) government led by Kwame Nkrumah, made massive investments in agriculture and manufacturing to lay a foundation for the emergence of our country as a modern industrialised nation. These socio-economic investments exceeded what had been achieved by Malaysia, India, South Korea, and Indonesia, that were the newly independent countries in the era.

Nkrumah justified the primacy of the state in economic investment and development on the observation that colonialism precluded the emergence of a viable capitalist class and private sector in the colonial economy. He concluded therefore that it was the responsibility of the state to assume the role of prime mover in the economic development of the newly independent country (Duncan 2009:27).

Many there are who have questioned this line of thinking and the action programme it engendered, but have offered no workable alternative that was not likely to return the fate of the newly independent

states into the suffocating embrace of the erstwhile colonial empire. On the contrary, the political and economic histories of Ghana's independence age-mates such as Malaysia, Indonesia and South Korea seem to suggest that the Nkrumah option was indeed a difficult but ultimately worthwhile way to go, provided there was prudent management and internal political will and consensus, strong enough to stand up to inevitable hostility from the erstwhile colonial and imperial order.

The new nation of Ghana did itself proud by embarking on the most massive programme of development ever recorded in the space of a few years – and which covered every sphere of national life: for education, a national network of brand new secondary schools distributed evenly across the country, a number of technical institutes and teacher training colleges, and two new universities, one devoted to science and technology, the other to the production of graduate teachers; in health, the introduction of a free health care system and the building of new clinics and polyclinics for various communities; in transport, the launch of a national airline, which took off on its maiden voyage with an all Ghanaian crew (Captains Agyare, Ampomah and Dorkenoo); in trade and industry, the establishment of as many state owned enterprises as possible, at one point 60 new ones within twelve months, the expansion of the one old harbour and the building of a new one from scratch, complete with the new municipality of Tema, and a national shipping line, Black Star Line (after Marcus Garvey's historical model); in science and technology, the establishment of the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission; in research and high level intellectual work for industrialisation, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research as well as the Ghana Academy of Science and Letters; in arts and culture, the Institute of Arts and Culture, Institute of African Studies – with a national dance company, Bureau of Ghana Languages, School of Translators, Ghana Television, and Ghana Film Industry Corporation; in agriculture, massive subsidies to individual farmers, especially cocoa and also tobacco farmers, and a country-wide network of state farms, several of them run by the state-sponsored Workers Brigade, a network of silos for eventual storage of surplus food during bumper seasons – all of them criminally abandoned after Nkrumah's overthrow; and on and on.

Clearly, the expansion of national assets on such a massive scale in such a short time must have posed major management and maintenance challenges. Perhaps this was where the trouble began. Many have wondered what happened to the over 200 million pounds Nkrumah's government is said to have inherited as foreign reserves. He certainly did not divert it into secret personal Swiss and other bank accounts. We can or should see where most of it went – into a phenomenal expansion of national assets. But for how much profit for the nation at large and for how long? We may never be able to answer this question with absolute certainty, given the abrupt end to the Nkrumah dream and programme of action. But of one thing we are quite sure – nothing else that we have tried since then has worked sufficiently as to put the lie to the Nkrumah dream and programme.

Among the many slogans that Nkrumah's followers often recited, to the annoyance of those who had reason to hate him, was the claim that 'Nkrumah Never Dies'. Maybe this was indeed too much of a presumption. But among some of our people, there is the saying that a person may die and be buried, but his or her tongue never rots. By the tongue, they mean words, but more than words, they mean the person's ideas, especially as enshrined in various memorable sayings (or writings) and as translated into action. No matter how we assess Nkrumah's life, no matter what final judgment we come to on his role in the history of Ghana, of Africa and of the world, one thing stands out – that he was indeed a man of action, positive and sometimes negative action. But above all, he was a man of ideas, a visionary intellectual whose ideas shine brighter, like a star in a dark sky, the farther we move away from his own place, his own time. Few things stand stronger and last longer than ideas that have the force and the purity of fundamental truths, especially truths that relate to the ultimate desires of all human beings, desires such as freedom. With a remarkable gift for words, Nkrumah was able, often, to state his great ideas in unforgettable images:

There is only one way to Africa's survival: a union of African States ... I have visions of great cities in Ghana with large factories and cultural institutions, inhabited by people who are happy, cheerful and resilient, venturing unto the realms of knowledge, sci-

ence, industry and technology. On our political horizon, I can see Ghana within the framework of a united Africa, making her voice and strength felt in the counsels of the world. If ever there was time for unity, concord, concerted action and relentless personal sacrifice at home, this is it (Nkrumah 1960).

That vision of a self-defining Ghana prospering in the global arena 'within the framework of a united Africa' was indeed a compelling dream for which Nkrumah will always be remembered. Those who doubted the wisdom of that vision have since discovered that African people have tried every other option, but to no avail. And as if to spite Africa, Europe, her erstwhile imperial majesty, has recently seized upon that same dream, and is now busy running ahead with it, albeit with certain technical difficulties.

During what must have been his last visit to Ghana, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere paid a private visit to the W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Centre for Pan African Culture. He stood for a while in front of the tomb of the man known to history as the Father of Pan-Africanism. Then he turned to the small group that had gathered around him, especially members of the management board of the centre. 'This is good, very good indeed. But you must do a similar honour for Nkrumah. After all, it was Nkrumah who brought Du Bois back to Ghana, to Africa.' And then, almost in a whisper, as if speaking to himself, we could hear him say: 'I wonder how many of us understood what he was trying to tell us then?'

Often, the loftiest vision of independence is clouded by colonially conditioned responses of the professional and political elite. Nkrumah was, of course, fully aware of this challenge. His error, if indeed it was an error, was to alienate and even antagonize most of the elite, to assume that once he managed to win over the so-called masses to his side, he would in due course subdue the opposition of the elite. As it turned out, the opposition was not only stronger than he imagined, but also unforgiving, and would go to any length to neutralise his efforts, or indeed eliminate him if need be. What he was to eventually come up with as his final option, may have been his gravest miscalculation. The complexity of his dilemma was such that we must turn to Femi Osofisan, literary artist and master of words, to capture it most poignantly in the language of poetic drama:

Nkrumah: We will rebuild those castles so that, when next you go to Cape Coast, you'll see, not a tomb crammed with the noisy wailings of the past, but a monument of progress, a glittering testimony to the genius of the black race, to the immense possibilities of human freedom! That's the mission of our new nation, Doctor, why we name ourselves Ghana, and I want you especially to believe in us.

Du Bois: It's a beautiful dream ... a tall dream...

Nkrumah: But we'll get there, I swear it to you! We've survived the last three centuries, haven't we? Three hundred years during which our land became the warehouse of European adventurers ... They stripped us of our gold and diamonds, of our timber and cocoa. And finally the British colonised us. But it's over now, we have won our freedom. We've recovered the right to shape our own destiny.

Du Bois: I want to believe that. That's why I came here, isn't it? But, with all I see around, tell me frankly – have the British left?

Nkrumah: I don't understand ...

Du Bois: Tell me I am wrong. Because, I'm sorry, the people I see around you offer me little assurance. For the British cannot be said to be gone, when they have left so much of themselves behind – inside all of you...

Your ardour is infectious! But still – what about the educated elite? Can you build a modern nation without the collaboration and the commitment of your educated elite?

Nkrumah: We will re-educate them. Make them learn from the masses.

Du Bois: Like rolling a river up the hill.

Nkrumah: It can happen, Doctor, yes. It's the saying among our people, that mountains have been known to surrender, when the river is stubborn.

Du Bois: But, will you have time?

Nkrumah: We will have to create it.

Du Bois: And if they decide to fight back? If your elite resort instead ... for instance, to throwing bombs?

Nkrumah: Then we'll have no choice but to eliminate them.

Du Bois: That's what I'm afraid of: Your Preventive Detention Act.

Nkrumah: You see another alternative then? Teach me, you who have travelled so widely and for so long – is there some other option for a nation like ours, already three hundred years behind the rest of the world?

Du Bois: I don't know, I confess. All I can say is – good luck, my son. (Osofisan:n.d)

Dr Du Bois's wish of good luck was clearly well meant. But Nkrumah ran out of luck sooner than he was prepared for. There is now some debate as to whether his political opponents at home or the combined forces of neo-colonialism, working especially through the American Central Intelligence Agency, must take the greater credit/blame for sabotaging and finally grounding Nkrumah's beautiful Pan-African dream. However we choose to share the 'blame-credit', it is important that we do not overlook one little but essential detail – Nkrumah's ultimate inability to sell his dream not only to his formal opposition, but especially to significant numbers of his own following, including leading members of his own party and cabinet and some of those entrusted with his personal security.

It is as if his mother's words to him as a child had caught up with him in a cruel twist of irony: 'You see the big trees in the forest? They stand alone' (Milne 1999:4). But the final burden of the irony is that the fall of the tall mahogany or iroko or silk cotton, is much more than an individual's calamity; it is a tragedy for every other member of the forest, from the nimble climber plant to the tiniest living thing, to even the mighty eagle soaring up in the skies, seeking new shelter against the storm.

Jane, a character in Femi Osofisan's play *Nkrumah-ni...Africa-ni!* tells us that 'once a dream is born, in the name of freedom, we cannot halt it ... Such dreams ... tend to be carnivorous, and there's nothing we can do about it. At least that's what history tells us. Sometimes, they eat up those who give birth to them' (Osofisan 2009:56). These are very sobering words, but we can at least take consolation in the knowledge that the dreams that Nkrumah gave birth to and which eventually ate him up, are still here with us, despite determined and repeated attempts to kill them. The challenge for us is to take hold of those dreams and run with them into a more viable future for our children. That is why I feel humbled and privileged to have been chosen, through the

Nkrumah Chair, to be part of the intellectual task force that must refocus and clarify those dreams and hand them over to the new and future generation of Ghanaians and Africans. The way I understand it, there was some fundamental lesson Nkrumah tried to teach us. It is a lesson I can best explain through the medium of a parable, or rather a dilemma tale:

Once upon a time, there was a man born into rather fortunate circumstances. At birth, he was endowed with an unusually rich land, a land blessed with unimaginable wealth. But there was this neighbour who coveted his inheritance and decided to turn his fortune into misfortune. There were rumours that this neighbour was not only greedy and envious; he was a *juju* man as well. Our friend of good fortune fell ill. All the greatest healers of the land tried their best to save his life. He recovered somewhat, but was warned that the cause of his illness could be traced to this neighbour who wished him dead. Somehow, for reasons not entirely clear to most people, our good friend decided to go to this very neighbour for medicine that could restore him to full health. Few people were surprised when it turned out that the more help our friend got from his neighbour the worse his condition became. They say that the story is not over yet, and there is a real fear that one of these days, his neighbour's various slow poisons will finally finish him off. The greatest surprise is that the one man who tried to warn our friend against his wily neighbor became his greatest enemy.

A few years ago, a symposium was organised to mark Nkrumah's birthday. A number of speakers insisted that the problem with Nkrumah was that he was too far ahead of his time. At the end of it all, Capt. (rtd) Kojo Tsikata pointed out that it was both unfair and incorrect to keep saying that Nkrumah was too far ahead of his time. To put it that way, is to put the blame on him for doing the right things at the right time. The truth, he suggested, was that we were too far behind the times. We must be honest enough to admit that we are the ones who need to catch up with Nkrumah's vision, and in so doing, catch up with the rest of the world.

With the benefit of hindsight, we must revisit and reassess Nkrumah's legacy in the light of where we now find ourselves in this new millennium, beyond his time, beyond his place. I have no doubt that

such reassessment should help us see our way clearer into the future we carelessly threw away. Mr Vice-Chancellor, I intend to dedicate much of my tenure as the first occupant of the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies not only to my personal research agenda, but also to one or two specific projects that may help point us in the right direction.

Given the abundance of myths, half-truths and blatant lies that have been peddled about Nkrumah and the African liberation project he led with such remarkable, even if short-lived success, it is important that we move quickly to reclaim whatever reliable information there may still be around. To this end, I propose to launch a project titled *Homage: Personal Testimonies of the Independence Era and its Aftermath*. *Homage* is a proposed video/television series that will feature personal testimonies of significant individuals who were key players and/or keen witnesses to some of the most important events leading up to and immediately following Ghana's Independence, through Nkrumah's overthrow and into the era of military rule. Drawing on my experience as host and executive producer of GTV's *African Heritage Series* and of the documentation project of the CODESRIA African Humanities Institute Programme, I am currently working on a line-up of potential witnesses to probably the most significant era of Ghana's history, an era that needs to be carefully documented for posterity.

A second, more ambitious project I wish to propose is entitled the 'Kwame Nkrumah Pan-African Intellectual and Cultural Festival', a bi-annual intellectual and cultural festival to be organised under the auspices of the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies, in honour of Nkrumah's dedication to a tradition of vigorous and liberating Africa-centred intellectual and cultural activity, such as was outlined in the major address he gave on the occasion of the formal opening in 1963 of the Institute of African Studies. Inspiration for such a festival comes from the example of the *Annual Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Intellectual Festival Week* of the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, under the auspices of the Julius Nyerere Professorial Chair in Pan-African Studies. The maiden edition of the Nyerere festival was held from April 13-17, 2009. A close study of the full line-up of events suggests that such a festival is certain to provide a critical impetus for the promotion of a major international dialogue on

Pan-African thought and struggle. The University of Ghana, through the Kwame Nkrumah Chair, is in a very good position to not merely copy the good example of Dar es Salaam, but to draw on Ghana's multiple connections with the history of Pan-Africanism to fashion a unique programme of intellectual debate and cultural events that could easily and quickly grow into one of the most significant events on the university's calendar. The plan is for the first occupant of the Kwame Nkrumah Chair to lead a planning committee to put together a comprehensive programme for the festival, with the Institute of African Studies and the CODESRIA African Humanities Institute Programme as joint coordinating units but working in collaboration with other departments, such as the School of Performing Arts and the Departments of History and Political Science. Unlike the annual Dar es Salaam festival, the Legon festival should be held once every two years. The idea is to devote each intervening year to finalising publications and other products from each edition of the festival. This should also allow reasonable time for fund raising and careful planning. The maiden edition of the Kwame Nkrumah Pan-African Intellectual and Cultural Festival is intended to be held in September 2010, around the next anniversary of Nkrumah's birthday. It is envisaged that core festival activities will include an international symposium as well as a cluster of cultural events, such as film shows, literary readings/performances, dramatic and musical shows, as well as a package of activities specially designed for the younger ones in schools and colleges. Every effort will be made to produce professional video documentaries on each major event for eventual wider circulation.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, colleague faculty members, students, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I must take this opportunity to appeal for support in cash and in kind for the success of the work of the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies. The two projects outlined above are important as ideas, but they must be translated into a programme of action that will bring honour to the legacy Nkrumah has left for us. It is my hope that I can count on the necessary support for our plans to translate these ideas into action.

I salute the foresight and fortitude of various directors of the Institute of African Studies, from the founding director Professor Thomas Hodgkin who led much of

the foundation work, from the Venerable Emeritus Professor J.H. Kwabena Nketia, pioneering scholar in African Studies who is quietly sitting here among us today, to his successor Professor K.A. Dickson and to Professor Kwame Arhin, who first raised a proposal for the establishment of an Nkrumah Chair, to Professor George P. Hagan who kept the mission of the Institute alive through some troubled times, to my good friend K.E. Agovi who joined the ancestors a bit too soon, to Professor Irene Odotei, who brought a new spirit of intellectual activism into the work of the Institute, to Professor Takyiwaa Manuh, who lobbied successfully for an endowment for the Nkrumah Chair, to Professor Brigit Sackey who held the fort briefly and helped to settle me into the Institute, to Professor Akosua Adomako Ampofo, who has moved so quickly and efficiently to make sure this installation takes place and in grand style. To my colleague, sister, and friend Dr Esi Sutherland-Addy and the entire installation planning committee, and all fellows and staff of the Institute, I offer my deepest gratitude for this gift of a ceremony worth remembering. I salute the incredibly rich and creative foundation work accomplished by founding fellows of the Institute, especially Dr Ephraim Amu, Professor Mawere Opoku, Dr Efua T. Sutherland, Professor Joe de Graft, Dr Jawa Apronti, among others, and their noteworthy successors such as Professor Kofi Asare Opoku and Professor F. Nii-Yartey. I join the director of the Institute and the Vice-Chancellor in thanking AngloGold-Ashanti for providing an endowment for the Nkrumah Chair, and the Ghana@50 Secretariat for facilitating access to the endowment. I am grateful to Professor Kofi Nyidevu Awoonor, Chairman of the Council of State, for sharing with me countless hours of conversation on the historical and contemporary struggles of African peoples and in particular Nkrumah's singular contribution to that struggle. I share the joy of this special honour and privilege with my wife, Professor Akosua Anyidoho, my daughters, Dr Nana Akua Anyidoho and Akofa Anyidoho, and other members of my family who are here in the hall, all of whom have been a constant source of strength for me in all my endeavours.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, my sincere thanks to you for presiding over this installation ceremony. But, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, may be you did not notice, as you led me in the procession towards this hall, that my

steps were a bit sluggish, my gait not so certain. I can now confess that I walked into this Great Hall with a slight feeling of unease, a vague sense of sadness and a feeling that I was about to perform a eulogy for a great man we all once repudiated, an ancestral pathfinder who is still being demonised by some among us. However, as I settled back into my seat and took a good look around me, as I read the several hundred faces that smiled back at me from every corner of this hall, as I listened carefully to your introductory remarks and to those of Professor Adomako Ampofo, as I watched my comrade and brother Professor Olufemi Taiwo perform his well-crafted *oriki* that made my already big head grow even bigger, as I listened to the drums and watched the dancers in their invocation of ancestral voices and presences, a sense of total calm took over my thoughts. The mood and quiet vibrations that floated through me from this wonderfully rich and diverse audience has offered me new hope, the hope that our world may yet be ready to listen to

Nkrumah's voice as it calls out to us from the shadows, reassuring us that all is not yet lost. I thank this great audience for restoring my faith in our collective future.

### Note

- \* This paper was delivered as the Installation Lecture for the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon.

### References

- Arhin, K., 2000, *A View of Kwame Nkrumah 1909-1972: An Interpretation*, Accra: Sedco. p. 10.
- Awoonor, K., 1994, *Africa: The Marginalised Continent*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.
- Busia, K.A., 1962, *The Challenge of Africa*, London: Frederick A. Praeger Inc. & The Pall Mall Press.
- Duncan, E., 2009, And Nkrumah Died. *Daily Graphic*. Monday, November 2..
- James, C.R.L., 1969, *A History of Pan-African Revolt*. Washington DC: Drum and Spear Press.
- July, R.W., 1987, *An African Voice: The Role of the Humanities in African Independence*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Milne, J., 2000, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Biography*. London: Panaf Books.
- Nkrumah, K., 1963, Address to a Conference of African Freedom Fighters, Accra, Ghana.
- Nkrumah, K., 1957, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*. Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., pp. 44-45.
- Nkrumah, K., 1960, 'Tradition and Culture', A Speech delivered at Kumasi. December 10.
- Osofisan, F., *A Nightingale for Dr. Du Bois*. Work in Progress.
- Osofisan, F., 2009, *Nkrumah-ni...Africa-ni!* Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd.
- Padmore, G., 1953, *The Gold Coast Revolution. The Struggle of an African People from Slavery to Freedom*. London: Dennis Dobson.
- Rooney, David, 2007, *Kwame Nkrumah: Vision and Tragedy*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers. p. 48.