

Nkrumah and the Quest for African Unity

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Abstract

Originally, Pan-Africanism, as a unique cultural and spiritual movement for the promotion of negritude became first used among the black Americans and West Indians of the 19th century. However, it assumed a political dimension in the 20th century, with several adherents, within and outside Africa. Kwame Nkrumah was one of the proponents of Pan-Africanism, a strong movement for African unity. He was the first African leader to attract international fame in this regard and represents for the black world a symbol of unity. It is therefore not surprising that the Organisation for African Unity is his brain child. As a radical nationalist, he believed that the true and complete independence of African can only be achieved as a united people with a common goal. The focus of this paper is to highlight Nkrumah's political thought, how it addresses the problems of African independence and the global solution to Africa's problems through a unified effort in Pan-Africanism.

Key Words: Pan-Africanism, Kwame, Nkrumah, Unity, Africa, Quest, Consciencism, Liberation

Introduction

During the 19th century, the scramble for territories by European powers took a new turn as they began to make significant advances to tropical Africa. By 1913, European powers had divided the African continent into a patchwork that showed little or no regard for ethnic and linguistic boundaries. This opened the African version of colonialism (Kanu 2012). The human and natural resources of Africa were exploited, independent African communities lost their political liberty, Africa suffered a crisis of 'self-confidence', creating a lasting sense of inferiority and subjugation that builds a barrier to growth and innovation. In the face of these exploitative and ideological devaluation of the black race, emerged an interesting package to the development of African political ideology (Kanu, 2010).

Many Africans began the search for an ideological project of self-affirmation and assertive cultural nationalism. Among these were Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Pilot of Nigerian Independence, Leopold Senghor, appraised as an apostle of negritude, Kwame Nkrumah, a radical nationalist and a proponent of Pan-Africanism, Obafemi Awolowo, a socialist oriented nationalist, Julius Nyerere, the father of Ujamaa Socialism (Nwoko, 2006). The focus of this paper is to highlight Nkrumah's political thought, how it addresses the problems of African independence and the global solution to Africa's problems through a unified effort in Pan-Africanism.

The Man Kwame Nkrumah

Kwame Nkrumah is one among the notable African Nationalists of the 20th century. He was born 21st September, 1909 at Nkroful in Ghana. He trained as a teacher at Achimota School in Accra from 1927 to 1930 and for the next five years, he taught in several schools in the Gold Coast. He had his post secondary education in the United States of America and in Britain from 1935 to 1947. He enrolled in Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, where he graduated in 1939 with a B.A and received a bachelor of sacred Theology in 1942. Nkrumah earned a master of science in education in 1942 in the university of Pennsylvania and Master of Arts in philosophy in 1943.

He taught political science at Lincoln and also preached at black Presbyterian churches in Philadelphia and New York City. He has a couple of achievements attached to his name. In London, he helped organize the fifth Pan-African congress in Manchester, England. Then he founded the West African National Secretariat to work for decolonization of Africa. In early 1947, Nkrumah was invited to serve as the General Secretary to the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), which marked the beginning of his quest for Africa's liberation and unity.

According to Ebenezer (1982), he quickened the pace of liberation in Africa (and) inflamed revolution in many parts that never knew it. Nwoko (2006) avers that he was the first African leader to attract international fame and represents for the black world a symbol of unity. The Organisation of African Unity is his brain child.

On 10th March 1952 Nkrumah was elected as the Prime Minister and on March 6th 1960, he announces plans for new constitution which will make Ghana a Republic. On 19, 23 and 27 April 1960 a presidential election plebiscite on the constitution was rectified Nkrumah was elected president.

He was over thrown by a section of the Ghana Army led by the late General Emmanuel Kotako and late General Amansa Akwasi Afrika (then a Major) in coup d' etat. He died in exile on the 17th of April, 1972 at Bucharest, Romainia at the age of 63, six years after he was overthrown. He has the following works attributed to him: Towards Colonial Freedom (1962); Africa Must Unite (1963); Conscientism (1964); and Autobiography (1965).

Colonialism and the Liberation of Africa

Nkrumah criticized the imperialist's government for their intention to perpetually dominate Africa, a domination that finds expression in the monopoly and control of capital by the imperialists against their dependent colonies, the financial enslavement of the world's majority, the emergence of unequal development and struggle between the rich and poor countries; these struggles are usually resolved in war (Nwoko, 2006). He thus looked forward to a time when the forces of European exploitation of Africa will destroy its own working principles.

According to Nkrumah (1962), its destruction of its own working principles will begin with the emergence of a colonial intelligentsia, the awakening of a national consciousness, the emergence of a working class movement and the growth of a national liberation movement, which will tend towards the establishment of a free press to stir up political consciousness and educate the people on their rights and freedom; it must also have a good social, economic and political plan.

According to Nwoko (2006), Nkrumah's liberation movement aims at three spheres: political freedom, in terms of independent government; democratic freedom, in terms of a democracy whose sovereignty is vested in the masses; social reconstruction which includes freedom from poverty and economic Exploitation. Closely related to imperialism is neo-colonialism. Nkrumah christened neo-colonialism as the highest stage of imperialism. He sees it as imperialism abandoning its old form of naked exploitation and to enter the neo-colonial stage. In the neo-colonial state, the old exploitation continues but this time the supervisors are the national bourgeoisies. Three methods of exploitation are noted.

First, the multinational corporations supervise one aspect of the exploitation; second, Balkanization also enables neo-colonialism to continue, and finally, those who provide aid to the African countries subtly ensure its perpetuation. According to Afari-Gyan (1976), the concept of neo-colonialism parallels that of socialism in importance in the thought of Nkrumah. He sees neo-colonialism is the number one enemy of Africa's development. Therefore, Asante (2010) avers that socialism is an antidote to neo-colonialism and anything that promotes the growth of socialism serves to frustrate neo-colonialism.

Consciencism as a Path towards Liberation

Nkrumah's search for the right formula for the decolonization of Africa reached its pick with his development of the idea of consciencism. The reason for the need for philosophical consciencism is built on the irreversibility of the dynamic changes which had taken place in African society under the influence of alien cultures, together with the view that for any institution or ideology to be effective, it must relate to the conditions of the people it seeks to serve. Through a process comparable to gestation or grafting, philosophical conscientism would synthesis a harmonious whole out of the otherwise conflicting cultures in Africa.

According to Nkrumah (1964), African history through the centuries has accumulated much of confused teachings and orientations from external influences: colonial imperialists, Islamic and Euro-Christian elements, thus producing equally as confusing and conflicting vision. The situation has been worsened by the deceptive presentation of African history as a story of Western adventure. To undertake fully the venture of the unification and liberation of Africa, a reforming, revolutionalizing and inspiring philosophical system is indispensable. He calls this system *Philosophical Conscientism*. It would serve as a "body of connected thought which will determine the general nature of our action in unifying the society which we have inherited, this unification to take account, at all times, of the elevated ideals underlying the traditional African society" (p. 78).

According to Nwoko (1988), this would further equip the African to sift and bland appropriate values for the major elements of African history to form or fit the Africa personality. To help resolve the crisis of conscience already created by the contact between Africa and the West, Nkrumah (1964) further writes that, Our philosophy must find its weapons in the environment and living conditions of the African people. It is from those conditions that the intellectual content of our philosophy must be created. The emancipation of the African continent is the emancipation of man. This requires two aims: first, the restitution of the egalitarianism of the human society, and, second, the logistic mobilization of all our resources towards the attainment of that restitution. (p. 78). He believes that this would help bring about the total liberation of the African person.

Nkrumah and Pan-Africanise

The Pan-African movement, as a unique cultural and spiritual movement for the promotion of the black race, was dedicated to the establishment of independence for African nations and cultivating unity among black people throughout the world. It encourages the solidarity of Africans, based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social, and political growth and that the fates of all African peoples and countries are intertwined, they share not merely a common history but common destiny. As a concept, it was not first used by Nkrumah, Pan-Africanism was first used by black Americans and West Indians in the early 19th century (Legum, 1962). It originated during the conferences held in London in 1900, 1919, 1921, 1923 and other cities. W.E.B. Du Bois was a principal early leader (Nkrumah, 1963).

The important sixth Pan-African conference (Manchester, 1945) included Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah. The first truly intergovernmental conference was held in Accra, Ghana, in 1958, where Patrice Lumumba was a key speaker. The Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) was founded by Robert M. Sobukwe and others in South Africa in 1959 as a political alternative to the African National Congress, which was seen as contaminated by non-African influences. The founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU; now the African Union) by Julius Nyerere and others in 1963 was a milestone, and the OAU soon became the most important Pan-Africanist organization. In early 1958, as earlier indicated, Nkrumah invited all the African states (that is the independent states) to a conference in Accra to discuss issues of mutual interest. Nkrumah (1963) avers that the reason for the conference was to

Exchange views on matters of common interest; to explore ways and means of consolidating and safeguarding our independence; to strengthen the economic and political ties between our countries; to decide on workable arguments for helping fellow Africans still subjects to colonial rule; and to examine the central world problem of how to secure peace (p. 132). Further, the reason for this first historic gathering of purely African states leaders is for them to know themselves, get to share ideas affecting them individually and generally. Nkrumah (1963) spoke of the great dangers which are colonialism and racialism.

What Nkrumah wanted was total political integration. His continental union was to have three main objectives: overall continental planning on a continental scale; a unified land, sea, air, military and defence strategy; and a common foreign policy. Nkrumah emphasized that the interests of neo-colonialism and the objectives of African governments are directly opposed, for whereas the strength of African countries lies in their unity, the strength of neo-colonialism lies in their disunity. He believed that a united socialist Africa is a necessary condition for the realization of the African Personality, and positive neutralism and non-alignment, the necessary medium for its expression.

To boost the unity of Africa, he wrote a work titled, *Africa must unite*. In this work, he proposed the need for the establishment of a people's party to promote the establishment of a central organisation and political solidarity in Africa. Nkrumah (1963) wrote that, We need the strength of our combined numbers and resources to protect ourselves from the very positive dangers of returning colonialism in disguised forms. We need it to combat the entrenched forces dividing our continent and still holding back millions of our brothers. We need it to secure total African liberation. (pp. 216-222).

As regards defence, he further argued that, If we do not unite and combine our military resources for common defence, the individual states, out of a sense of insecurity, may be drawn into making defence pacts with foreign powers which may endanger the security of us all. (pp. 216-222). With the dawn of the colonial era, Kanu (2012) argued that former independent African communities lost their political liberty with the division of the African continent into a patchwork that showed little regard for ethnic or linguistic boundaries.

With this, Davidson (1995) the communities were squeezed into about 50 colonies marked out now by frontiers that took no account of the interest of African convenience. The Somali people were divided into four colonial systems: some were under the British, some under the Italians, some under the French and others under the Ethiopians. We also have some Hausas under the British rule in Nigeria and others under the French in Niger. As a result, people who were bound by ties of culture, language or even blood were divided by new territorial frontiers, which made them citizens of different states. Nkrumah (1963) however avers that the arbitrary partition of Africa should not discourage us towards the quest for unity.

For in practice, such a unity requires a common political basis for economic planning, defence, foreign and diplomatic relations. To help the unity of Africans, All-African People's Conferences was opened in 1958 and organized several conferences, championed by Nkrumah. In 1963, in conjunction with other African nationalists, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was established, now known as African Union (AU).

Conclusion

In Nkrumah we find a representation of the struggle for a free and democratic Africa. A struggle which never ends as Haberman (2012) as put it, "it is a law of life". The continuity of this struggle is evident in the fact that his theory of neo-colonialism is still very valid today; with the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in Africa, most African countries, including Ghana, cannot truly claim that they possess economic independence since the decisions for implementation of the SAPs are taken in New York and the West.

The essential features of his political thought include: an undivided Ghana-united in true independence; one united and indivisible continent of Africa. This can be achieved through a continental union government; large scale socio-economic reforms to eliminate and eradicate all colonial institutions; the struggle for economic independence of African states based on socialist principle; establishment of African high command to combat all imperialist and racialist forces in Africa; advocate a socialist democracy that will give the people control over the means of production and distribution.

A cursory glance at the Pan-Africanist position reveals that its advocates often champion socialist principles and tend to be opposed to external political and economic involvement on the continent. As an ideology, it homogenizes the experience of people of African descent. They also point to the difficulties of reconciling current divisions within countries on the continent and within communities in the Diaspora.

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