

## The 21st Century and Challenges to the Nkrumah Independence Project: Towards a Renewal: A View from the Caribbean

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### Abstract

Ghana's historical place in the experience of global decolonisation as being the first British controlled African nation to win formal independence, has given the ideas of Kwame Nkrumah a prominent place in efforts to understand the challenges and possibilities of the post-colonial independence project. One of Nkrumah's main contributions was his exposure of the mechanics of neo-colonialism in compromising the formal statehood of newly independent states. Given the transformed world-economy and the hegemonic ideology of neo-liberalism which has unfolded several decades after Nkrumah's earliest reflections, this paper seeks to assess his validity for present efforts at sustaining post-colonial development and sovereignty. The central claim of this paper is that whilst Nkrumah's warnings against neo-colonialism remain valid, both the specific challenges which he identified as well as the corrective proposals which he offered, have been negated by the new tactics and ideological assumptions of neo-liberal capitalism. The paper offers a balance sheet type assessment of the ongoing relevance of Nkrumah's ideas, with a view to identifying the new challenges confronting the independence of formerly colonised states, and to renewing his political project in the present. These questions are explored in the context of the twenty-first century English-speaking Caribbean.

**Keywords:** Kwame Nkrumah, Post-colonial challenges, Neo-liberalism, Sovereignty

### Résumé

La place historique du Ghana dans l'expérience de la décolonisation mondiale, en tant que première nation africaine sous contrôle britannique à obtenir une indépendance formelle, a donné aux idées de Kwame Nkrumah une place importante dans les efforts visant à comprendre les défis et les possibilités du projet d'indépendance postcoloniale. L'une des principales contributions de Nkrumah a été sa dénonciation des mécanismes du néocolonialisme conçus pour compromettre le statut officiel des États nouvellement indépendants. Compte tenu de la transformation de l'économie mondiale et de l'idéologie hégémonique du néolibéralisme qui se sont développées plusieurs décennies après les premières réflexions de Nkrumah, cet article cherche à évaluer sa validité pour les efforts actuels visant à soutenir le développement et la souveraineté postcoloniaux. L'affirmation centrale de cet article est que si les mises en garde de Nkrumah contre le néocolonialisme restent valables, les défis spécifiques qu'il a identifiés ainsi que les propositions correctives qu'il a offertes ont été annihilés par les nouvelles tactiques et hypothèses idéologiques du capitalisme néolibéral. L'article propose une évaluation de type bilan de la pertinence actuelle des idées de Nkrumah, en vue d'identifier les nouveaux défis auxquels est confrontée l'indépendance des États anciennement colonisés, et de renouveler son projet politique dans le présent. Ces questions sont explorées dans le contexte des Caraïbes anglophones du XXI<sup>e</sup> Siècle.

**Mots clés:** Kwame Nkrumah, défis postcoloniaux, néo-libéralisme, souveraineté

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## Introduction

Ghana's historical place in the experience of global decolonisation as the first British-colonised African nation to win formal independence as well as Kwame Nkrumah's work on decolonisation have given his ideas a prominent place among formerly colonised states in understanding the practical and intellectual necessities of the post-colonial project of the 21st Century. As noted by Cooper (in Biney, 2011: 2), "there is a particular poignancy to the history of Ghana because it was the pioneer. Kwame Nkrumah was more than a political leader; he was a prophet of independence, of anti-imperialism, of Pan-Africanism". Similarly, Caribbean intellectual CLR James (1977: 7) identifies Nkrumah's independence revolution as "one of the most significant revolutions of the century". Noting that "there was still much of great importance to past and future history to be said about it", he sees Nkrumah's project as having "struck imperialism in Africa the blow from which it would never recover".

Nkrumah's relevance resides in the fact that he, perhaps more than any other post-colonial political leader, focussed his intellectual attention upon, and confronted most directly, the question of the requirements for achieving true decolonisation. Specifically, one of Nkrumah's main contributions was his detailed exposure of the limits of independence through the mechanics of neo-colonialism which severely compromised the formal statehood which the young Ghana was experiencing.

It is this specific concern which makes Nkrumah's ideas relevant to the post-colonial world in the early twenty-first century. Given the deeply transformed world-economy and the hegemonic consolidation of neo-liberalism which has posed new challenges to the viability of the independence project, this paper seeks to engage in a critical assessment of the continuing validity of Nkrumah's reflections for the present efforts at post-colonial development and advancing national sovereignty. The paper's central claim is that whilst Nkrumah's warnings against neo-colonialism remain valid, both the specific challenges which he identified as well as the corrective proposals which he offered, have been problematized by hegemonic neo-liberal capitalism. Just as Nkrumah's reflections on "Neo-Colonialism" were deliberately aimed at exposing the detailed modus operandi of imperialism in the early period of "flag" independence, this paper similarly argues that it has become necessary to engage in reflections on the challenges to independence and the mechanics of imperialism in the era of neo-liberalism. The paper therefore addresses the new challenges confronting the independence of formerly colonised states, and identifies how Nkrumah's project for true independence can be advanced in the present.

The paper seeks to do the following: first, since a central claim of the paper is that new features of imperialism not anticipated by Nkrumah are now being experienced, the paper presents a brief theoretical critique, in line with Herb Addo (1990), of Nkrumah's error in describing neo-colonialism as the "Last Stage of Imperialism" (Nkrumah, 1965). The paper will therefore engage in a brief examination of theories of imperialism which might have assisted Nkrumah in avoiding the error of over-optimism which his theory of neo-colonialism betrayed. The paper also presents a critical appraisal of Nkrumah's main prescriptions for overcoming imperialism in its "neo-colonial" aspects. The final section gives a brief update on political developments in Africa and the Caribbean which indicate the renewal of Nkrumah's project of uncompromising anti-colonial decolonisation, and offers prescriptions for advancing independence relevant to the specific challenges confronting post-colonial sovereignty in the early twenty-first century.

### **Theoretical reflections on imperialism: Re-assessing Nkrumah's neo-colonialism**

One of the less discernible features of Nkrumah's formulation of neo-colonialism, is the fact that it is an idea which is fundamentally optimistic in the potential of the formal Westphalian state to become genuinely anti-colonial. On the surface, such a proposition might appear odd and difficult to sustain given that Nkrumah's book, *Neo-colonialism*, reads like a lamentation about the "wiles of imperialism" in rendering the early period of formal decolonisation meaningless. Indeed, Neo-colonialism is often seen as representing Nkrumah's "climb down" from the high hopes which he had expressed in *I Speak of Freedom*, (Nkrumah, 1961) where he had recommended that one should "seek first the political kingdom" following which, economic freedom and domestic empowerment, cultural reconstruction, Pan-African unity, military self-defence, and all the other attributes of "true independence" would be added.

It is clear that the dominant assumption guiding Nkrumah was his full anticipation that the end of imperialism was imminent. Nowhere is this optimism seen more clearly than in Nkrumah's hinted subtitled assumption that neo-colonialism represented a last or final stage of imperialism. Thus, while Nkrumah's book *Neo-colonialism* presents a number of negative features confronting newly independent states, the work is underpinned by the expectation that with the growing number of nominally independent states, and with the growing global awareness of the techniques of neo-colonialism, imperialism would soon be at an end. Nkrumah's contribution can therefore be summarised as the totality of the effort in proposing the measures that would hasten the end of neo-colonialism, and by extension, imperialism.

It is the reality, therefore of imperialism not having come to an end, but having deepened and consolidated itself more firmly more than fifty years after Nkrumah's observations, which informs the perspective of this paper. It is the continued ability of imperialism in its neo-liberal form to reverse the gains of the Nkrumah period, and the non-realisation of the key prescriptions which Nkrumah had offered which makes it necessary to reflect on the

relevance of his ideas in the changed world in which Africa and the rest of the post-colonial world now exist.

While Nkrumah's optimism in the transformative power of the post-colonial state can be easily understood in the context of the euphoria associated with the ending of several decades of direct colonialism, a deeper understanding of the operationalisation of imperialism would have resulted in a far more circumspect prognosis on the possibility of total liberation.

One place where such a warning of caution has been sounded against the habit of offering over-optimistic prognoses of imperialism's imminent end, is the work of Ghanaian scholar Herb Addo (1986). Addo's perspective was informed by Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems perspective (Wallerstein, 1991) which holds that the challenges of imperialism may be far more persistent than otherwise acknowledged (Addo, 1986: 1). The utility of the world system perspective in explaining the failure of development and the frustration of national liberation, resided in the fact that it pointed to a more sobering view of imperialism as a "permanent" feature of global politics and the world-economy since: "central to the world-system methodology is the importance accorded the role of markets in the development and operation of the capitalist world-economy... The argument is simply that it is not possible to consider the development of the capitalist world economy without considering the essential part played by world trade from the very beginning" (Addo, 1986: 27).

Like Addo, the German Marxist revolutionary-activist and intellectual Rosa Luxemburg also raises cautions against Nkrumah's over-optimism in the ability of the post-colonial state to bring to an end the impact of imperialism and neo-colonialism. According to Bronner (1997: 86):

by showing the indissoluble link between capitalism and imperialism, Luxemburg attempts to demonstrate that structurally capitalism is an international system, that is intrinsically tied to imperialism and that generates its own limit. In that sense, imperialism is not a 'stage' of capitalism; it merely highlights the capitalist totality in the modern epoch. Because it is intrinsically tied to the capitalist system of production, imperialism cannot be 'reformed' out of existence.

It is on the basis of such concerns that Addo cautions against the tendency of presenting an "over-precise" definition of imperialism as a specific stage in the development of capitalism. Addo's observations offer a useful critique of Nkrumah's overly optimistic diagnosis of neo-colonialism as a final stage of imperialism. Addo (1986: 97) argues that this tendency "derives from the basically erroneous belief of Marxists... that the rest of the world is merely an underdeveloped Europe, waiting to be developed by 'European capital'". He argues that whilst Lenin's Eurocentrism may be excusable, "what is difficult to accept is why post-Lenin Marxists still insist on using this clearly Eurocentric view of capitalist development for the study of the capitalist world-system, the problem of which, because of Europe, are different from Europe's".

A general weakness of much of the post-colonial leadership in Africa and the Caribbean, both Marxist and (especially) non-Marxist, is that they have approached the development of their domestic economies on the basis of such Eurocentrism. The dogma of trickle-down economics has deepened their attachment to the idea that they can catch up with the developed world and that this is a worthwhile venture. Caribbean governments in the early 21st century routinely propose in so-called development plans that they aim to arrive at developed country status within specified time frames regardless of conditions in the region. They demand that the poor must refashion themselves as entrepreneurs and promise to facilitate business but not the people's well-being. This is a marker of the extent to which neoliberalism's promise of trickle down "to the rest of us" is treated as a truth. This has meant a continued failure to prioritise "the people" in steering economics.

In contrast to the over-optimistic view of seeing neo-colonialism as the last stage of imperialism, Addo (1986: 105) argues forcefully that

externalisation of capitalism has been around in various forms for as long as capitalism has been around in various forms. And from this perspective we cannot hastily dismiss the prehistory of capital's external expression as sheer plunder, or sheer colonialism, because the making of world-history began with such prehistorical expressions of capital in evolution. The point becomes that capitalism, since its very beginning, has been expansive, and still is; and that the structural deformities which we see in the world today are the continuing products of capitalist expansionism.

Nkrumah erred, therefore, in his anticipation that "flag" independence would mark the end of imperialism, and that neo-colonialism was its final stage. An alternative understanding would have prepared him for the possibilities of imperialism adjusting its methods, shifting the location of its centre, but continuing in its essential form as a method of unequal exchange or naked extraction as a core feature of capitalism. This would not preclude the necessity of understanding the specific features of imperialism in his lifetime, but would have allowed for a greater sense of realism in the possibilities of transformation, in the fashioning of his concrete responses. As implied by Addo (1996: 123), such an approach would lead to an understanding that "different parts of the world experienced the effects of the capitalist world expansion at different times".

One potential danger in stressing the “permanent-stage of capitalism” thesis is that it may result in an opportunistic and fatalistic acceptance of imperialism which can militate against direct anti-imperialist responses. On the other hand, however, Samir Amin’s “Delinking” perspective, has struck an important balance between understanding the persistence of imperialism, while remaining grounded in the need for radical action in the periphery. In Amin’s (1990: 158) view, while the “working class at the centres has lost its revolutionary vocation by renouncing its plan for its own society and for the abolition of class by contrast, the unequal development of capitalism gives the people of Asia and Africa an unforeseen vocation: they are called upon to overthrow the capitalist order in their own locality”. Indeed, in Amin’s reading, far from blunting revolutionary activity, it is the rise of neo-liberalism which hastens rather than diminishes the possibilities of crises in the world system:

The crisis of capitalism has certainly put an end to the Keynesian illusions and to those of the ideology of development, while the ideology of socialism has certainly not yet encountered a solution to its problems. But the vacuum caused by this triple crisis has been filled by a conservative offensive of a ‘neo-liberalism’ preaching a universal remedy – the market. But the stubborn pursuit of the policies that this dogma inspires can lead only to disaster and the contrary of the objective it seeks: to disaggregation of the world system and a renewal of confused clashes between unbridled nationalisms (Amin, 1990: ix).

Amin’s acknowledgment of the possibilities of action therefore provides a useful entry point into the task of examining the concrete proposals which Nkrumah had offered for achieving radical decolonisation and for assessing how the struggles for freedom can be advanced and renewed beyond the steps pursued by Nkrumah’s generation.

### **Overcoming neo-colonialism: Nkrumah’s prescriptions – A critical appraisal**

Despite his of over-optimism in imperialism’s imminent collapse, there remains much value in Nkrumah’s detailing of the ‘tricks of imperialism’ in the era of neo-colonialism. However, given the significant global economic and political changes which have occurred since the 1950s, it is necessary to update Nkrumah’s analysis by first examining what he perceived as the main challenges confronting the newly independent states, and secondly by examining the relative relevance of his prescribed solutions in the current era of global neo-liberalism.

It is customary for writers to separate Nkrumah’s analytical prescriptions into two periods: the first before his deposition by coup d’état, and the second, following the coup and coinciding with his exile in Guinea. The first period is seen as marking a more moderate Nkrumah who was, among other things, open to British and Western investment particularly in support of his development-driven infrastructural projects such as the Volta dam; less effusive in his advocacy of socialism and more open to a mass democratic movement; and more conciliatory, diplomatic, and consensus-driven in his approach to the project of African unification.

In contrast, the second period saw Nkrumah as being less tolerant of external interference with Ghana’s independence. It coincided with the more challenging period which saw resistance largely by former French colonies to his project of a unified Africa, and the assassination of Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, representing more naked imperialist aggression. The second period is generally identified as marking Nkrumah’s more radical turn to the left, his movement away from pacifism and mass action to military confrontation and guerrilla warfare, his more anti-western stances, his more open identification with Marxist-Leninism, and his less diplomatic approach to achieving a strong African Union.

While Nkrumah’s optimism in the transformative power of the post-colonial state can be easily understood in the context of the euphoria associated with the ending of several decades of direct colonialism, a deeper understanding of the operationalisation of imperialism would have resulted in a far more circumspect prognosis on the possibility of total liberation.

Nkrumah’s main prescriptions can be examined through four broad concerns: the need for economic control and self-sufficiency, Pan-African continental unification, the need for military resistance to overcome external interference, and the adoption of a one-party state in response to the failure of inherited liberal-democratic institutions such as political parties and trade unions. As part of this discussion, the basic elements of Nkrumah’s seven-year development plan articulated in 1964 will also be discussed since the plan represented the concretisation of his aspirations for anti-colonial development of Ghana. The merits and demerits of specific aspects of the seven-year plan in light of the new challenges of neo-liberalism will be discussed. This will assist in clarifying the later discussion of how anti-colonial freedom can be understood in a moment vastly different from the one in which Nkrumah’s plan was articulated.

#### *Economic Control and Self-Sufficiency*

Nkrumah’s recommendations for economic control and self-sufficiency, remain very significant, given the existence of imperialism as essentially an economic phenomenon. His economic prescriptions focussed on three main issues (a) the control of the resources by the post-colonial state by the external imperialists; (b) the continuation of the trade regimes which perpetuate colonial relations to the benefit of the dominant Western

powers; and (c) the influence by global financial multilateral institutions like the world bank and the IMF, over internal policy of the new states

In his examination of the post-colonial economic relations, Nkrumah (1965: 241) sees a “strong factor favouring western monopolies and acting against the developing world” as residing in “international capital’s control of the world market, as well as of the prices of commodities bought and sold thereof”. He further refers to the “neo-colonialist trap” which has come to be known as “‘multilateral aid’ through international organisations: the IMF, IBRD, International Finance Corporation” and others, and he identifies the powers of such institutions as involving:

the conclusion of commerce and navigation treaties; agreements for economic cooperation; the right to meddle in internal finances, including currency and foreign exchange, to lower trade barriers in favour of the donor country’s goods and capital; to protect the interests of private investments; determination of how the funds are to be used; forcing the recipient to use counter-part funds (Nkrumah, 1965: 243).

Nkrumah’s concerns over economic control by foreign interests became even deeper when, following his overthrow, he was forced to watch from the side-lines the reversal of his nationalisation policies and the re-emergence of foreign control over key aspects of the Ghanaian economy:

You have seen with your own eyes the shameful disposal of Ghana’s assets. Our state hotels are now foreign owned. The 21-mile rubber plantation developed by the State Farm Corporation has been handed over to the Firestone Rubber Company of America. The whole economic situation is the negation of an independent economic policy; and a downright sellout to American and other foreign, capitalist financial interests (Nkrumah, 1973: 414–415).

Significantly, many of these tendencies have now become the only accepted practice under neo-liberalism. The neoliberal period has seen African and Caribbean economies in various forms of “adjustment” that demanded their opening to world trade and perpetuated their preparedness to offer low wage labour to the global economy. In a climate where transnational capital can move with ease, investors interested in low wages find ready facilitators in African and Caribbean governments. This, however, puts these regions in no better position in terms of the global power structure. At the same time, China has begun to make its mark in these regions, offering more favourable “exchanges” of wealth, including infrastructure development across Africa and the Caribbean. In this new dispensation, China has moved from revolutionary partner in the struggles of the global South (third worldism), where “solidarity has been replaced by pragmatic business relations in the era of global neoliberalism” (Lewis, 2018: 162). China’s growth has been wedded to the expansion of opportunities for growth in Africa and the Caribbean, but growth does not, as is understood, necessarily lead to development and it raises the problem of new imperial relations with China in terms of economic control of the resources of these regions.

#### *Pan-African continental unification*

Linked to the issues of economic control, was Nkrumah’s concern about the inability of the post-colonial states to unite as a defence against external control of Africa’s resources. This led to the second of his anti-neo-colonial prescriptions, that is, the need for political unification or at the very least greater levels of economic cooperation among the newly independent African states. This is perhaps the greatest legacy of Kwame Nkrumah. This commitment to unification is seen in his inclusion in the original independence constitution of a mechanism that would allow “for the national sovereignty which has been fought for” to be “given up in the interest of a United States of Africa” (James, [1962] 1977: 163). It was also seen in the “secret agreement” signed between Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba on 8th August 1960, which pledged to merge their two countries into a unitary state, as a first step towards a United States of Africa, a project which was overturned by Lumumba’s assassination (Nkrumah, 1973: 150).

A central feature guiding Nkrumah’s insistence on political unification was his unwillingness to accept the inherited state boundaries artificially created by the former colonial powers. Relatedly, Nkrumah was decidedly against an approach to unification which was governed by regional associations defined by past European linkages. It is this which marked Nkrumah’s opposition to the stances of the Ivory Coast and other Francophonie countries whose regional projects were pursued more as French dependencies, rather than as independent African states. Thus Nkrumah in *Africa Must Unite*, argued that:

While we in Africa, for whom the goal of unity is paramount, are striving to concert our efforts in this direction the neo-colonialists are straining every nerve to upset them by encouraging the formation of communities based on the languages of their former colonizers. We cannot allow ourselves to be so disorganized and divided (cited in Nkrumah, 1973: 213).

Such a continental outlook was particularly critical to Nkrumah given the significantly large amount of resources which could be mobilised by the African community: “our continent gives us the second largest land stretch in the world. To draw the most from our existing and potential means for the achievement of abundance and a fine social order, we need to unify our efforts, our skills and intentions” (Nkrumah, 1973: 213). Nkrumah’s refusal to accept the imposed state and linguistic boundaries of the colonial period was a significant intellectual breakthrough.

In the twenty first century, Nkrumah’s vision of African unity remains valid. However, what has been witnessed is a re-assertion of neo-colonial control over the separate African states by old European powers, the USA, and newly emergent powers like China. The Francophone states continue to exist as dependents of France’s economic and currency system. There have also been no success stories of unification projects beyond the inherited boundaries. Indeed, the tendency has been towards fragmentation. While the African Union has been established as an important institutional pillar of the formal integration, given its economic and policy-dependence on the European Union, it has become an instrument of neo-liberal development rather than the socialist and nationalist vision which had been anticipated by Nkrumah.

In addition, new externally-determined concerns about containing terrorism and externally-driven notions of security have placed African unification as secondary to the goals of the US military’s (Africa Command) AFRICOM and have meant the pursuit of military objectives that are shaped by global imperialist interests.

As progressive as Nkrumah’s call for greater African unification had been, the challenge to the state by global capitalism is far deeper than he envisaged. Where Nkrumah had anticipated that a stronger and unified African state would provide for a deeper basis for African post-colonial sovereignty, in the present moment the very idea of sovereignty has been hollowed. The reach of external forces into internal decision making of African states has been deep, challenging the efficacy of Nkrumah’s proposed continental unity. Indeed, as will be explored later, the elite nature of Nkrumah’s unification vision has limited the ability of regionalism to be truly anti-colonial, given the related failure of independence as an elite project.

#### *Military resistance against external interference*

Among Nkrumah’s more radical recommendations was his call for military struggles against colonialism. This marked an important step in his latter-day awakening to the full lengths to which imperialism would go to overturn post-colonial independence:

In Africa, we thought we could achieve freedom and independence, and our ultimate goal of unity and socialism by peaceful means. This has landed us in the grip of neo-colonialism. We could not succeed using non-violent methods (Nkrumah, 1973: 427).

This embrace of violence put Nkrumah closer to Frantz Fanon, who had seen revolutionary violence as an essential and necessary part of national liberation (Fanon, 1983). Significantly, in his handbook on revolutionary warfare, Nkrumah, like Fanon, saw the military struggle as being indistinguishable from the political struggle and as being a necessary condition for true liberation:

Military strategy pre-supposes political aims. All military problems are political and all political problems are military [The] only way for the broad masses to eradicate neo-colonialism is through a revolutionary movement springing from a direct confrontation with the imperialists, and drawing its strength from the exploited and disinherited masses [emphasis in original] (cited in Nkrumah, 1974: 457-458).

Relatedly, the failure to win economic independence was seen as directly linked to the unwillingness of the colonies to engage in direct military confrontation with imperialism. Military warfare was therefore seen as a solution to the lack of economic control (Nkrumah, 1973: 247).

The challenge facing Nkrumah’s recommendation of violence and direct military confrontation with imperialism, as with Fanon’s, is the fact that in the present era of neo-liberalism, many of the states whose independence had been won after sustained military struggles, have found their independence compromised by their incorporation into the norms of global neo-liberalism. Kenya, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Angola, and South Africa are all examples of states whose current incorporation into norms of global capitalism, bear little relation to the armed, militant nature of their anti-colonial struggles. Cuba is perhaps the only global exception to this experience.

In addition, in the post-colonial context, in many instances the military has been used as an instrument to frustrate internal democracy rather than as a safeguard against external imperialism, as Campbell’s (2003) reflections on Mugabe’s Zimbabwe have shown. The largely changed global context which has been ushered in with the end of the Cold War, coinciding with the consolidation of hegemonic neo-liberalism has severely negated Nkrumah’s (and Fanon’s) optimism in equating militarism with true decolonisation. While Fanon’s reading of decolonisation as the need to address the being created by colonialism remains relevant, what Campbell’s work most profoundly points to is the failure of masculinism as a way to think of liberation.

The role of the women's movement in making gender gains after apartheid, the rise in women's participation and leadership in politics in Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal, Ethiopia, Liberia and others and the continuing work of women in pushing peace, environmental protection, and anti-neoliberal economics in local activism across the continent have been especially critical to rethinking how post-independence liberation can occur in a deeper fashion than the emphasis on control of the state.

#### *The one party state*

Linked to the above recommendations was Nkrumah's prescription of the one party state. Like Lenin's vanguard party, Nkrumah arrived at the need for the one-party state out of the necessity of protecting the most progressive sections of the society and ensuring their control of the state apparatus (see Nkrumah, 1973: 454). This turn to the one party-state is perhaps the most criticised aspect of Nkrumah's proposals, with Ali Mazrui describing him as a "Leninist Czar" (as quoted in Biney, 2011: 5). This shift is also cited as one of the key reasons for CLR James' break with Nkrumah (James, 1977).

Not surprisingly, the one-party state option emerged out of Nkrumah's disappointment over the failure of the democratic project in which he had placed much faith prior to Ghana's independence. Following his overthrow, Nkrumah became convinced that political parties, trade unions and other organisational forms of formal civic representation central to liberal democratic practice, presented yet another mechanism by which post-colonial sovereignty was subverted. In his words (cited in James, 1977: 157–158):

Capitalism is too complicated a system for a newly independent nation. Hence the need for a socialist society. But even a system based on social justice and a democratic constitution may need backing up, during the period following independence by emergency measures of a totalitarian kind.

His reading of the urgency of the "catching up project", and his underlying lack of confidence in a democratic constitution in achieving social justice, pushed Nkrumah towards the Marxist-Leninist vanguard party solution, as an institutional framework to guide the newly independent states through the difficult path of navigating the wiles of neo-colonialism.

#### *The 1964 seven-year development*

All of these concerns were reflected in the 1964 seven-year development plan which Nkrumah had advanced as the main vehicle through which his project of radical anti-colonial decolonisation would be achieved.

Nkrumah's seven-year development plan can be seen as the typical program of post-colonial social-democratic national development, intended to break foreign control over the economy, to develop a domestic bourgeoisie while containing large capitalists both local and foreign, to modernise the economy, and to facilitate the social development of the population previously marginalised by colonialism, while attempting to break links with imperialism. Nkrumah's plan, however, reflected the schizophrenia between rejecting and adjusting to the reality of the hegemony of capitalism inherent in most anti-colonial development plans.

The plan acknowledged that the objective of socialism would "continue to remain a slogan until industrialisation was achieved" (Nkrumah, 1973: 190). This admission would set the tone for compromising with external capital while placing the burden of socialist policy on the domestic capitalist class, who were expected to accede to the domination of state enterprises and which were expected to "provide the bulk of state revenues" (ibid.: 191). Within such a framework, under the Foreign Exchange Control laws, for example, it was illegal for Ghanaians to "have property abroad without having declared this to the appropriate authorities" (ibid.: 193). Nor could they "take up shares in any enterprise under foreign investment (ibid.: 203). Similarly, the government insisted that "the operations of all economic enterprises in Ghana should conform to the national economic objectives and be subject to the rules and regulations which are made in pursuance of our socialist policies" (ibid.: 193). It was seen as harmful to Ghana's socialist path if the government was to "encourage the growth of Ghanaian private capitalism in our midst" (ibid.: 203). The group most directly to be disadvantaged by economic aspects of the plan were the wealthiest group of native Ghanaians. The small businesspeople were expected to have no difficulty in associating themselves with the cooperative sectors, and the foreign investors were too critical to the infrastructural needs of the country to be too heavily restricted.

Quite apart from its economic focus, the plan also emphasised the socialist objectives of widening technical and scientific education, advancing health and housing, the modernisation of the economy through the infusion of new technologies in agriculture and other enterprises.

What can be seen clearly, however, is that Nkrumah's seven-year development plan as well as his wider vision for the radical decolonisation of Ghana stands in stark contradistinction to what has become the dominant neoliberal ethos of promoting the expansion of private capital as the route to development. Given the much changed global environment since the articulation of Nkrumah's anti-colonial development, it is necessary to examine how neo-liberalism has upon ideas of post-colonial freedom and development and to discuss how anti-colonial freedom might be understood and how Nkrumah's project might be renewed into the twenty-first century.

### **Neo-liberalism and Nkrumah's project: A view from the English-speaking Caribbean**

One of the features which stands out immediately in any examination of the potential application of Nkrumah's prescriptions to the challenges of post-colonial development in the early twenty first century, is the extent to which neo-liberalism has negated, "hollowed out" or reversed the sovereignty of post-colonial states. While Nkrumah's prescriptions were offered at a moment when the formal decolonisation of post-colonial states was still an unfolding reality, the current moment of neo-liberalism has seen the further entrenchment of imperialist capitalist norms more than fifty years after the near completion of the process of formal decolonisation. Nkrumah had anticipated that the growing number of liberated states would mark the beginning of the end of imperialism; but the current era of neo-liberalism has revealed clearly the ability of capitalism to entrench and sustain itself even among states that had adopted militant anti-imperialist stances as their routes to independence. While Nkrumah's prescriptions against neo-liberalism had been premised on the existence of the Cold War and the existence of a socialist bloc creating space for the pursuit of independent and self-determined anti-imperialist policies, the present reality of the overthrow of European socialism and the end of the Cold War have undermined the global structural framework within which Nkrumah's radical options were premised. Indeed, the period has been marked by the near universal ideological legitimisation of capitalism. In addition, the wide global acceptance of liberal-democratic electoral mechanisms as the legitimate basis for regime change, has not only reduced the occurrence of militant national liberation struggles, but has also reduced policy options to a narrow range of "electable" concerns which essentially revolve around deeper, rather than reduced incorporation into global capitalism.

There is perhaps no region in which these tendencies are most clearly seen than among the English-speaking Caribbean countries. When compared to the states of Africa, the Caribbean countries began their existence as sovereign states with some distinct disadvantages which made their adoption of Nkrumah's anti-imperialist program even more difficult. The Caribbean states suffer from small size, small populations, limited land and natural resources, and beyond the slave and immediate post-slavery period, had little experience of military resistance to colonialism as a route to independence. Heavily dependent on British tutelage and gradualism as a route to independence, the Caribbean experience was one of "constitutional decolonisation" (Munroe 1972) and, with the brief exceptions of Guyana in the mid-1950s, Grenada in the early 1980s, and to a lesser extent Jamaica in the mid-1970s, stayed within the capitalist and formal liberal democratic tradition.

Given their origins as weak, nominally sovereign states, the Caribbean region has found itself even further constricted by the current consolidation of neo-liberalism. Joseph (2018) has seen the key theoretical assumptions of neo-liberalism as including: the privileging of private capital over the social good; the assumption of the economic sphere as given and natural, whilst the political sphere is artificial and therefore subject to containment; the privileging of the individual over the social; the idea of the state as the facilitator of private capital accumulation at the expense of the protection and enhancement of civil society; the notion that the state should retreat from the economic sphere and should confine itself to security and labour regulation; the claim of the end of ideology and the assumption that all other options are closed; and the notion of the "death of politics" which holds that all major political questions have been resolved and the only role left for politics is "administration", leading to the rise of technocrats and the privileging of "management" over leadership, according to Caribbean scholar, Rex Nettleford (1993: 21). The reflexive adoption by a new generation of post-colonial rulers of neo-liberalism as the only game in town; the changed global balance of forces which has seen the retreat of national liberation movements; the overthrow and destabilisation of middle-income states such as Libya, Iraq and Syria; the ongoing reversal of Latin American social-democratic governments such as Maduro's Venezuela and Lula/Rousseff's Brazil, and the rise of a Latin American fascist right as in the 2018 election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, are all developments which have further undermined the possibilities of achieving Nkrumah's aims of genuine independence through political freedom, democratic freedom and social reconstruction.

The question remains therefore: what is the future of Nkrumah's project of "nationalism, Pan-Africanism, socialism" and how are these objectives to be achieved in the present moment of the early twentieth century?

### **Achieving true independence in the twenty first century: Outlines of the future possibilities of the African revolution**

The most important lesson that emerges from the setbacks to the independence project in Africa, Latin-America and the Caribbean is the fact that their independence experiences have been essentially elite projects aimed at placing the European state form in the hands of Westernised groups as the first step towards independence and national development. As such, it is this westernised, elitist version of independence which is now facing deep crisis under neo-liberalism.

From the very earliest, the most strident critiques of the forms of independence pursued by African and Caribbean leaders all placed emphasis on the distance between the ruling elites and the mass of the population in the unfolding of the national liberation movements. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the Frantz Fanon's famous exposure of the pitfalls of national consciousness in which he warned of the failure by westernised petite bourgeois elites to truly transform the post-colonial economy and polity in the interest of the broad masses of the population.



Whilst Fanon's rejection of the national bourgeoisie springs partly from his insistence on violence, his criticism extends to the failure of the colonial petite bourgeoisie, arising out of their economic dependence on the metropolitan ruling class, to create institutions of genuine proletarian democracy. On the basis of their many weaknesses, Fanon therefore recommends a model of politics in which the petite bourgeois places itself in a subordinate role to the genuinely national, and less western-tainted elements of the post-colonial formation (Fanon, 1983: 120).

A similar concern about the weaknesses of the local ruling elite was raised by Amilcar Cabral. In contrast to Fanon, Cabral felt that the technical skills and knowledge of the western-educated bourgeoisie was critical for post-colonial development, but he recommended the "class suicide" of the westernised groups in order that "they may be born as revolutionary workers" (Cabral, 1974: 89).

However, while the issue confronting them both was essentially a democratic question, neither Fanon nor Cabral addressed the issue of democracy directly, nor did they provide institutional blueprints through which the power of the mass of the population could supersede that of the westernised elites in the post-colonial context.

In contrast, the Caribbean intellectual CLR James went furthest in insisting on new forms of mass proletarian democracy which would transcend the limited inherited liberal-democratic forms and would allow for a truly socialist response to the challenges of post-colonial development. Significantly, James who had been a friend and mentor to Nkrumah, found himself breaking with the Ghanaian revolutionary over the latter's turn to the authoritarianism of the one-party state. James's critique revolved around the fact that Nkrumah had created greater distance between the leadership and mass. "How has all of this catastrophe overtaken the people of Ghana"? CLR James asked. His answer:

First Nkrumah, like all the other African leaders, and Asian leaders too, has been fooling himself and a lot of other people with a dangerous fiction – its name is democratic socialism. As long as you don't take it too seriously, as Mr. Manley, Sir Grantley Adams, Dr. Jagan, Mr. Nehru do not take it too seriously, it does no particular harm except to confuse a majority of voters on your behalf. But if like Nkrumah you do, and Nkrumah is a very serious, determined person, you end up with the totalitarian state – no democracy and no socialism (James [1962] 1977: 183–184).

Despite the typical cynicism of James's tone, he was pointing to the expected difficulty of pursuing a socialist option within the framework of global capitalism and the corresponding anti-democratic, authoritarian and anti-people tendencies which were likely to emerge once such an option was being pursued without creating wider means for peoples' participation.

James's vision therefore sought to reconcile proletarian democracy and anti-colonial development. Much of his work revolved around presenting arguments for new proletarian forms of democracy which would be both genuinely socialist and genuinely democratic and would transcend the built-in elitism of representative democratic institutions. James saw the inherited liberal institutions like political parties and trade unions as tools of oppression as distinct from being tools of liberation. In *Party Politics in the West Indies*, he insisted that the modern political party, despite its democratic promises, was essentially an organisation which cut off the mass of the population from decision making (James, 1984a).

In response to this, James proposed his mass party model, which he saw as being an advance on Lenin's Vanguard Party since it eliminated the distinction between the "party as government" and the party as "mass mobilisation". The seeds of this new form of government, to James, have been evident in historical expressions of "workers councils" which, in his view, have always emerged spontaneously in revolutionary moments but have often been crushed by formal party structures and their petite bourgeois leadership who have failed to facilitate the emergence of genuine workers' revolutionary organisations. It was a view shared by anti-totalitarian thinker Hannah Arendt, upon whom James relied in constructing his criticism of centralised authoritarian leadership. Arendt (1963: 252–253) in remarking on the spontaneous appearance of workers' councils (soviets) in European revolutions, saw them "as the spontaneous organs of the people" which presented "an entirely new form of government, with a new public space for a new freedom which was constituted and organized in the course of the revolution itself".

Not only did James present these new organisational forms as alternatives to the liberal-democratic form, but he saw them as necessary for ensuring post-state forms of socialism and Pan-Africanism. Today, Venezuela's attempt at a twenty-first-century socialism is an important case study, not only for its emphasis on social justice but also for the attempt to create democratic institutions from the bottom up. The popularity of Hugo Chavez should not be seen as mere hero worship, "Yo Soy Chavez", but also as resulting from attempts to mobilize the population with a view that the people could not be left behind in the politics. Insofar as James's argument is concerned, we can ask: What does it mean not to be too serious about democratic socialism or to take it seriously? We know neither Nkrumah nor Manley was able to produce the kind of politics in which the people were themselves deciding the future, whether the choice was capitalism, socialism, or the nation-state over a broader Pan-African vision. We know that yet, the state form has not given itself over to the peoples' agendas in either Africa or the Caribbean, but the struggle continues.

We do see that Pan-Africanism in practice as an institutional form has had some movement in emphasizing people where, for instance, the African Union has centred peace making across the continent as critical to any ideas of advancement and its inclusion of the sixth region of Diasporic Africans in its structure has built on the people-to-people networks pushing Pan-Africanism. We see that as a contrast to what has been deemed rising xenophobia against other Africans in South Africa, Ghana leads the way (as in the past) with its 2019 “Year of Return” for Diaspora Africans. We have also seen a renewed interest in people to people forms with the holding of the 8th Pan African Congress and follow-on conferences. The short is that while the forms imagined by Nkrumah has not necessarily yielded fruit, the emphasis on Pan-Africanism has the potential to find new energy and form in the twenty first century.

While Nkrumah’s objectives of socialism, Pan-Africanism and nationalism remain critical to any attempts at anti-colonial development in the early twentieth first century, any successful overcoming of the challenges ushered in by hegemonic neo-liberalism, can only come about by the creation of new organisational forms which place political power in the hands of the genuinely anti-colonial masses. In the absence of this, the people will eventually come into conflict with the state. We see in the case of post-apartheid South Africa, for instance, a persistent engagement with the ANC from its own base on its failure to live up to the aims of the anti-apartheid struggle. We see in the shack-dwellers movement, organizational forms rooted in the idea that “we have no choice but to live as human beings” (S’bu Zikode, cited in Prashad, 2018). Gibson notes that each rollout of neoliberal restructuring was resisted in South Africa, including by the group formed in the countrywide revolts of 2004–5, Abahlali baseMjondolo. It distinguishes itself as a democratic movement based in the premise that “policy makers ‘speak to us not about us’” not as “a request for service delivery, [as in the neoliberal mindset] but for the democratisation of development” (Gibson, 2011: xiv–xv).

One of the critical explanations for the revolutionary shortcomings of the post-colonial state was the fact that the mass of the population had been brushed aside, and once left exposed, the ruling elites had been unable to provide alternatives to external economic control of the wealth of post-colonial states. Following the logic of CLR James, only the mobilised people can serve as bulwark against external imperialism, and only new political forms can serve as vehicles for effectively shaping resistance to neo-liberalism. The old parties and trade unions, led by the westernised elites have proven ineffective in these struggles. Only in this way can Nkrumah’s agenda be advanced into the twenty first century.

Today, in the era of neo-liberalism a new round of resistance is beginning to emerge. The old state form has exhausted itself, and this is exacerbated by the very contradictions of neo-liberalism in facilitating external wealth at the expense of the mass of native populations everywhere. Even within the context of state control, the party system and its form of “majority rule” is being challenged in South Africa. Though a small party with little electoral base, the Economic Freedom Fighters Party led by Julius Malema, with the support of non-EFF mass mobilization against post-apartheid injustices has been able to push the ANC to address the problem of mal distribution of land. While the ANC had successfully ushered in modern liberal democratic practice without economic transformation to South Africa, the EFF and others have been carving an anti-neoliberal agenda which is pushing South Africa to the brink in terms of the ANC’s commitment to pro-imperialist economic relations (see para. 8 of EFF The Founding Manifesto).

The land question is crucial in South Africa, as in Zimbabwe, across Africa and in the Caribbean, especially with the Chinese as a newly important player in global capitalism. The Chinese presence, while on the one-hand a welcome break from the form of power relations between the West and the developing world is creating new problems of land grabs, racial conflict, the well-being of labour and political independence. Rather than focus on the failures of the state and its particular view of development, the most critical location on which attention might be placed is on how ordinary African and diasporic people are making claims that challenge state power and its elitist orientation in the neoliberal period.

It is also necessary to acknowledge the limits of liberal democracies advanced by Nkrumah and seen in present efforts at liberation such as in demands that “Fees Must Fall”, “Rhodes Must Fall” and “Zuma Must Fall” in the post-apartheid struggles. Such developments can be seen as growing alongside shack-dwellers efforts at democratizing development, claims for land across Africa and the Caribbean, or the re-energising of Pan-African solution seeking. There is also much potential for revolt in the unintended creations of neo-liberalism itself, such as the rise of apolitical politicians or the problems associated with Chinese interests in Africa and the Caribbean. There we see both failure of the liberal model and great potential in renewing the Nkrumah “independence” project. The failure rests in the way new emphases on growth continue to leave people behind and expose the limits of capitalism. The potential lies in the people’s capacity to reject the reality of being left behind. The way African people at home and abroad organise around resolving the questions left unanswered in the last phase of decolonisation will broadly determine the success or failure of the renewal of Nkrumah’s vision.

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