THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THOUGHT OF KWAME NKRUMAH
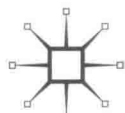
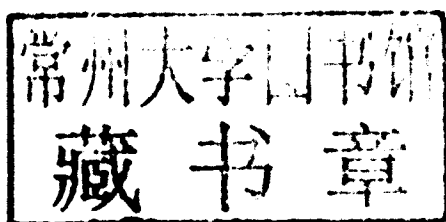## AMA BINEY

The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah

Ama Biney

palgrave
macmillan

Printed in the United States of America.

To Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem and all those unknown Africans killed prematurely as he prophetically and ironically said, "through inadequate public services compromised by corruption. Monies meant for drugs, roads, hospitals, schools, public security, etc. . . . are siphoned away making all of us vulnerable to premature death."

—Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, *"Corrupt Leaders are Mass Murderers"*

Acknowledgments

As students of history we can learn to honour great men and women without shutting our eyes to their faults. Perhaps these human imperfections make their achievements all the more heroic.

—Michael Stanford, *A Companion to the Study of History*, p. 41.

My fascination with Kwame Nkrumah began in my late teens during my under-graduate studies at the University of Birmingham in 1983 where I encountered Nkrumah as a larger-than-life figure and then in my years as member of the United Kingdom Chapter of the All African People's Revolutionary Party (AAPRP) led by Kwame Ture, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael. At Birmingham, Nkrumah was vilified in the readings I came across and by lecturers. In the AAPRP, he was shrouded in hagiography; critique was inconceivable.

My interest in Nkrumah eventually led to my formal enrollment as a part-time PhD student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London in 1998, under the supervision of Prof. Richard Rathbone and later Dr. John Parker. At this juncture I was, as most doctoral students were, unclear on what to focus on. It was June Milne, Nkrumah's literary executrix whom I met back in 1990, who inspired me to consider the subject of Pan-Africanism and Nkrumah. She wrote a reference for me and continued to offer encouragement and research materials at her wonderful house in Pinner, just outside central London. Gradually it became clear that the evolution of Nkrumah's ideas, essen-tially what motivated Nkrumah, was of immense interest to me. This became the focus of my doctoral dissertation and is the subject matter of this book. However, my approach to Nkrumah is encapsulated in the quotation from Michael Stan-ford that begins these words of acknowledgment. All great figures of history are simply flawed human beings, like all of us. How these defects and strengths in human character impact on their agency, vision, and material reality makes an analysis of the past fascinating.

Along my intellectual sojourn, I would like to sincerely thank my supervi-sors Richard Rathbone for his encouragement, his infectious enthusiasm, and for passing me into the rigorous supervision of John Parker when he retired in 2003.

Abbreviations

AAC	African Affairs Centre
AACPC	All African Committee for Political Coordination
AAPC	All African People's Conference
AAPRA	All African People's Revolutionary Army
AAPRP	All African People's Revolutionary Party
AAPSP	All African Socialist Party
AAS	African Affairs Secretariat
AAS	Association of African Students
AATUF	All African Trade Union Federation
ANC	African National Congress
ARPS	Aborigines Rights Protection Society
AU	African Union
AYA	Asante Youth Association
AYC	African Youth Command
BAA	Bureau of African Affairs
CA	Constitutive Act
CAA	Council of African Affairs
CIAS	Conference of Independent African States
CMB	Cocoa Marketing Board
CPC	Cocoa Purchasing Company
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPP	Convention People's Party
CYO	Committee of Youth Organisations
FLN	Front de Liberacion Nacional/the National Liberation Front of Algeria

GCCMB	Gold Coast Cocoa Marketing Board
GCP	Ghana Congress Party
GCTUC	Gold Coast Trade Union Congress
GNTC	Ghana National Trading Corporation
GCTUC	Gold Coast Trade Union Congress
GYPM	Ghana Young Pioneer Movement
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
KNII	Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute
KNWS	Kwame Nkrumah Welfare Society
LSE	London School of Economics
MAP	Muslim Association Party
MI	military intelligence
MNC	Mouvement Nacional Congolais/ Congolese National Movement
NAG	National Archive of Ghana
NASSO	National Association of Socialist Students Organization
NCBWA	National Congress of British West Africa
NCGW	National Council of Ghanaian Women
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NDP	National Democratic Party
NLC	National Liberation Council
NLM	National Liberation Movement
NPP	Northern People's Party
NRC	National Redemption Council
NSC	National Security Council
NUGS	National Union of Ghanaian Students
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OCAM	Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache
ONUC	United Nations Operation in the Congo
PA	Positive Action
PAC	Pan-African Congress
PAF	Pan-African Federation
PAIGC	Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde Islands
PANYMO	Pan-African Youth Movement
PDA	Preventive Detention Act

PDD	Presidential Detail Department
PDG	Parti Democratique de Guinea
PFA	Parti de la Federation Africaine
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
PNP	People's National Party
POGR	President's Own Guard Regiment
PPP	People's Progressive Party
PVAs	Party Vanguard Activists
TA	Tactical Action
TC	Togoland Congress
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UAR	United Arab Republic
UDI	Universal Declaration of Independence
UGCC	United Gold Coast Convention
UN	United Nations
UNIA	Universal Negro Improvement Association
UP	United Party
VRP	Volta River Project
WANS	West African National Secretariat
WASU	West African Students Union
WFTU	World Federation of Trades Union
YPM	Young Pioneer Movement
YPI	Young Pioneers Institute

Contents

CHAPTER 1

The Discourse on Nkrumah

Fundamentally, I do not believe in the great men theory of history, but I do think that so-called great men of history merely personify the synthesis of the tangled web of the material and historical forces at play.

—Kwame Nkrumah, "Nkrumah's Private Notes"[1]

The year 2007 marked fifty years since Ghana's independence, which ignited waves of African independence struggles across the continent. Kwame Nkrumah was a central figure in those tumultuous struggles of that era. It was a period also entangled with Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union as both countries were engaged in a contest for the mantle of world leadership.

"Show Boy"—as Nkrumah was referred to—possessed both a charismatic and controversial personality. His politics—domestically, on the world stage, and on the Pan-African stage was equally controversial. In a post–Cold War world and with historical events placed firmly in the past, a greater sense of perspective becomes possible in soberly reassessing Nkrumah's role and contribution. The specific task of this book is to analyze the political, social, and cultural thought of Kwame Nkrumah, one of twentieth-century Africa's most important nationalist leaders. Nkrumah's historical reputation is shrouded in considerable ambivalence and controversy. His performance as independent Ghana's first leader and his policies on the domestic, African, and international stage have continued to generate lively debate within African studies and in popular forums. African listeners to British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Focus on Africa reflected the popularity of Nkrumah in a poll in December 1999. Nkrumah was voted as "Africa's Man of the Millennium." Charles Abugre suggests that Nkrumah's legacy is far from monolithic: "Dead politicians are different things to different people. Both their good and their wrong define the goal posts and hence the playing fields upon which the survivors take their positions in society. Their good is usurped, their failures exhumed and magnified as appropriate and in accordance with creed. It is in the nature of humanity to review the past, for in doing so we not

only define our own essence but also seek to learn lessons if we genuinely desire to do so."[2] Shakespeare wrote that "the evil that men do lives after them but the good is interred with their bones." Of deceased political figures, Abdul-Raheem contends, "Politically, victims and beneficiaries remember both. It is the balance between the two [the good and the bad achievements] that determines their place in the politics of memory, which, like all memories, is prone to being selective."[3] Even General J. A. Ankrah, who headed the Supreme Military Council that took over Ghana after the February 24, 1966, coup d'état that toppled Nkrumah, confirmed that his place in African history had been assured. In short, Nkrumah has been vilified and revered for both his failures and achievements by scholars and ordinary people alike.

In the 1950s, Ghana and Kenya emerged as the two models of British decolonization on the African continent. The former was symbolic of the peaceful and constitutional route in the transfer of power and the latter of the more violent path. Both countries were constantly in the news and their nationalist leaders, Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, became household names. Nkrumah became a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent strategy of "Satyagraha" (soul force), which he coined as "Positive Action." This strategy was diametrically opposed to the armed struggle of the Mau Mau, which Kenyatta was erroneously associated with. These antithetical decolonizing strategies alarmed the British authorities. In the climate of Cold War suspicions and tensions, both leaders were suspected of being communists and using violence as an illegitimate method of agitation to achieve their political ends. Both leaders were imprisoned by the British and used the term "prison graduate" to consolidate their status as nationalist leaders.[4]

A broad literature on Ghana and Nkrumah emerged in the 1960s. Early scholarly writings included political histories of the country[5] and a plethora of biographical work.[6] Other emphases have included the nature of the handover of power in Ghana;[7] the emergence of political opposition to Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP);[8] the rise and nature of the one-party state Nkrumah created in independent Ghana;[9] and his economic policies from 1957 to 1966.[10]

As Cooper maintains, "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. His oft-quoted phrase 'Seek ye first the political kingdom' was not just a call for Ghanaians to demand a voice in the affairs of state, but a plea for leaders and ordinary citizens to use power for a purpose—to transform a colonized society into a dynamic and prosperous land of opportunity."[11] Similarly, Amilcar Cabral, the Guinea-Bissau leader, characterized Nkrumah in his eulogy as "the strategist of genius in the struggle against classic colonialism."[12] Hodgkin observed that Nkrumah's "radical Pan-Africanism had an influence on the attitudes and behaviour of a substantial body of people."[13] In terms of the positive impact of Nkrumah, the founding president of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, maintains, "Ghana's fight for freedom inspired and influenced us all, and the greatest contribution to our political awareness at that time came from the achievements of Ghana after its independence. It was from Ghana that we got the idea that we must do more than just petition the UN

[United Nations] to bring about our own independence."[14] Kenneth Kaunda, who led Zambia to independence, claims, "Nkrumah inspired many people of Africa towards independence and was a great supporter of the liberation of southern Africa from apartheid and racism."[15] Nkrumah's uncompromising announcement that "the independence of Ghana is meaningless unless linked to the total liberation of the African continent" translated into moral, logistical, and material support for dependent territories across the African continent. However, in the postindependence period it led him to be the focus of opprobrium from neighboring African leaders who considered his actions in aiding political dissidents as interference in the sovereignty of other states.

Nkrumah was central to the major debates and issues of the decolonization period of the 1950s and 1960s. Among these was the emergence of the modernization paradigm, which assumed that newly independent states would seek to imitate European systems of governance, economic growth, and values in order to build cohesive nation-states.[16] In attempting to forge national unity among disparate ethnic and religious groups, the belief was that these newly independent states would abandon tradition for "modernity." Nugent claims "a general sense of optimism was also reflected in the writings of an emergent community of Africanist scholars" during this time.[17] By the end of the 1970s, modernization theories had long been discredited. The mood of optimism had dissipated and was transformed into "Afro-pessimism" during the 1980s and 1990s. In the aftermath of independence, "a combination of charisma and efficacious leadership generated widespread popular support and legitimacy for the new leaders. However, legitimacy was highly contextualised in the sense that the mobilised masses developed an instrumentalist conception of political independence. They viewed it as a prelude to material progress and social welfare. In short, legitimacy was based on a fundamental African social compact in which the new political elites promised, at least implicitly, to produce less poverty and less inequality, in exchange for popular support."[18] Implicit in Nkrumah's famous dictum "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added unto you" was the promise of an economic paradise and accompanying riches for Ghanaian citizens of the newly independent state. It led Nkrumah in April 1957 to accept President Houphouet-Boigny's challenge as to which country (Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire) would be more developed in ten years. The "West African wager," as it became known, was part of the era's focus on the efficacy of development strategies. Nkrumah moved further to the political left and Ivory Coast espoused commitment to a free-market economy and reliance on French technical expertise and private investment.

Nkrumah lost his wager with Houphouet-Boigny, failing to transform Ghana into an economic paradise.[19] Whether this was on account of the socialist shift he made in 1961 is debatable, for Ivory Coast was economically aided by its former colonial master, France. However, as Young argues, "the Nkrumah shift in 1961 appeared part of a much broader movement in Africa" that was committed to creating a more egalitarian society on socialist lines in achieving material prosperity.[20] Along with Friedland and Rosberg, he maintains that the ideological

spectrum broadened during the first two decades of African independence and socialism became an attractive ideology to several African leaders.[21] Similarly, Killick contends that Nkrumah's adoption of a socialist economic strategy was part of the general trend toward development economics adopted by many developing countries at the time.[22]

Green also subscribes to the view that Nkrumah's socialist economic strategy was flawed by weak implementation, but despite this it was a rational and prudent policy choice.[23] Ghana under Nkrumah was one among what Friedland and Rosberg characterize as the "first wave" of socialist regimes in the 1960s.[24] Countries in this "first wave" included Tanzania, Algeria, Guinea, Mali, Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia. Collectively, this broad group is characterized by Young as "populist socialism" or "African socialism" on account of the fact that a socialist perspective shaped—or at least legitimated—major policy decisions in these countries.[25] As Young states, "Despite the tendency of socialism to dominate ideological discourse, it was never in reality the most widespread guide to policy choice in the 1960s because nobody loved capitalism…there was something shameful about openly espousing it."[26] Such a stance led some countries such as Malawi, Cameroon, and the Ivory Coast to describe themselves as "pragmatic," as they remained uncomfortable with the term "capitalist."

While some scholars such as Young and Metz place Nkrumah firmly in the "African socialism" school of thought, in 1966, in an article titled "African Socialism," Nkrumah clearly distanced himself from this brand of socialism.[27] Metz maintains that compared to Nyerere, Nkrumah's theoretical position on socialism adhered more closely to Marxist orthodoxy. Nkrumah subscribed to dialectical materialist analysis and believed that African society was a fusion of the traditional African way of life and Euro-Christian and Islamic influences. He did not urge a return to an idyllic traditional African society, as his contemporary Nyerere did. The term "scientific socialism" was eventually adopted by several African countries in the late 1960s and 1970s, including Congo-Brazaville, Ethiopia, Angola, and Mozambique. Political labels aside, Young contends that we should "not expect ideology alone will explain relative success or failure in achieving the central goal of a better life for the citizenry."[28] Political effectiveness is equally important in policy implementation in order to achieve increased material prosperity.

It is the argument of this book that Nkrumah was profoundly motivated by an ideological vision of radical socioeconomic development for both Ghana and a united Africa along socialist lines. As Young observes "ideology is not to be dismissed as simple, evanescent rhetoric" and since "few rulers are such philosophically inspired kings as to apply ideology alone to policy reason," this book seeks to examine Nkrumah's efforts to transform Ghana and Africa according to his radical vision.[29] While Nkrumah was ideologically motivated, he was also a pragmatist who was not bound to ideological dogmatism. Consequently, his vision was on occasion in tension with flawed and misjudged policy decisions that appeared inconsistent with his ideological preference. As Young writes, "Such dissonance may be rationalised as either not truly inconsistent with ideology

correctly understood or as a conscious and temporary departure from rectitude; it does not annul the worldview with which it is in tension."[30] Therefore, it is essential to study Nkrumah's ideological vision of the world and how he sought to transform Ghana and Africa if we seek to understand Nkrumah as a nationalist and Pan-Africanist.

Another debate in the literature in which Nkrumah surfaces relates to the nature of the one-party state and neopatrimonialism that emerged with his government. Mohan, Fitch, and Oppenheimer belong to the Marxian school of thought, which argues that Nkrumah's CPP traveled the path of neocolonial accommodation by inheriting Western parliamentary institutions and permitting Ghana's future economic development to be inextricably tied to Western finance capital. In so doing, Nkrumah enabled a Ghanaian petty bourgeoisie to dominate the party, state, and wider society by their access to state resources for self-enrichment. They contend that no fundamental structural change took place in Ghana's economy during Nkrumah's years in power.[31] At the time of the 1966 coup, the economy remained Western-orientated despite the intention of the Seven Year Plan (1964–1970) to increase economic trade with the Eastern bloc and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Instead, a stifling state bureaucracy emerged alongside an undemocratic party that no longer represented the interests of the majority of Ghanaians.

Contributing to the literature on personal rule in Africa are a number of writers.[32] Mazrui is among those that characterized Nkrumah as "the Leninist Czar," while Marable referred to him as "the Bonapartist benefactor."[33] They concur on the growing corruption and bureaucratization within the Ghanaian state, along with the cult of personality, as factors that led to an increasing concentration of power in Nkrumah's hands. In addition, they argue that Nkrumah, consciously or unconsciously, modeled himself on Lenin and Napoleon. In a far more trenchant critique, Pobee, Bretton, Omari, and Lacouture depict Nkrumah as a tyrannical megalomaniac.[34] Mazrui also concurs that "Kwame Nkrumah started as a democrat and ended his political career as a dictator."[35]

Other analyses of Nkrumah and postindependence African politics focus on the nature of the state inherited at independence and how nationalist leaders reconfigured state-society relations. Young's comparative work on the colonial state in Africa and elsewhere rests on the premise that the new nationalist leaders inherited the repressive structures of the colonial state. The "Bula Matari" complex impacted negatively and pervasively on the new postindependent African states.[36] In essence, after formal decolonization the African state continued to remain external to the citizen; African governments failed to engage their citizens in meaningful political participation; the state remained predatory and alien but in a new though equally repressive configuration wielded by new African elites. The state became an instrument by which African elites enriched themselves at the expense of the citizens and the latter saw their rights being increasingly eroded by a state that failed to produce the most basic of services. Instead the spoils of the state were distributed among those who considered themselves to be the "gatekeepers" of the state.[37]

Cooper argues that such patron-client relations were not peculiar to nationalist leaders but also colonial officials. However, the new African leaders "had trouble making the nation-state into a symbol that inspired loyalty."[38] Both Cooper and Mbembe examine the nature of the postcolonial state that emerged across the African continent. Cooper emphasizes that "gatekeeper states are thus not 'African' institutions, nor are they 'European' impositions; they emerged out of a peculiar Euro-African history."[39] In the case of Ghana, Cooper maintains that "even when Nkrumah became leader of the Gold Coast in 1951, he was operating under serious constraints."[40] He was reliant on cocoa revenues to diversify the economy and was in search of much-needed Western finance and technology to develop the country. The weaknesses of Nkrumah and many African leaders of this period, according to Cooper, was how they conceived of unity and political dissent: "Gatekeeper states' insistence on the unity of the people and the need for national discipline revealed the fragility of their all-or-nothing control; they left little room for seeing opposition as legitimate."[41] Neither did ordinary citizens have an opportunity to influence politics at the local level, for local government was given little autonomy.

"The politics of the belly," as Bayart contends, not only produces patron-client relationships, for "corruption and predatoriness are not found exclusively amongst the powerful."[42] The norms and modes of conduct exercised by the rich elite also permeate the thinking and conduct of their citizens—the little women and men—who also find unscrupulous means of taking their slice of the national cake. Moreover, since independence the struggle has been one not only for material survival but for a share in democratic government.[43] Therefore, in postindependent Africa a conflict emerged in which the youth, women, and urban workers sought to challenge the balance of power and redistribution of wealth in society.[44] In Ghana, workers, supported by market women, challenged the Nkrumahist state in 1961 and by the end of Nkrumah's government, much of the general population had become disillusioned with CPP rule.

Scholars such as Austin, Apter, Davidson, and James initially wrote positively on the achievements of the CPP between 1948 and 1957.[45] Austin's disillusionment with Nkrumah commenced with the postindependence period in which he considered Nkrumah's role as "an African Tsar" presiding over an intolerant nationalist party.[46] For Austin, "the circumstances of the time,"[47] together with the insensitivity and intransigence of the opposition "to act more prudently" were factors affecting the outcome of the developments during the 1957–1960 period.[48]

In 1964, Nkrumah transformed Ghana into a one-party state. Even prior to this, trade unions, women's organizations, and youth groups had become integral wings of his ruling CPP. In addition to this, the independence of the judiciary was seriously undermined in 1963 when Nkrumah sacked the chief justice. Nkrumah also encouraged a cult of personality that gave rise to acolytes in the form of "Nkrumaists." The centralizing machinery of the CPP state was all embracing. For Austin, "Single-party rule was achieved and defended not because the leaders believed it to be the price to be paid for securing the safety of the state but because it matched their own interpretation of the nationalist revolution to

which they laid exclusive claim."[49] Since Nkrumah was the nation's leader, it was his interpretation of the nationalist revolution that prevailed.

A central argument of this book is that although Nkrumah may be remembered for establishing the template of single-party rule and a bloated state bureaucracy, he was by no means the exception during this phase of Africa's history. Thirty-eight years since Nkrumah's death, scholars are now more capable of soberly reassessing Nkrumah's performance within a broader context of the historical, political, economic, and social trends of the period. One of the important legacies of the postcolonial state was the type of state structures it inherited from the colonial masters. As Cooper and Young contend, the postcolonial state followed in the footsteps of its predecessor, the colonial state, by collecting relatively little revenue from Africa's urban classes and peasants.[50] Mbembe argues that the colonial and postcolonial state claimed a total monopoly of politics. "Commandment" was premised on a regime of privileges and immunities for the ruling elite that excluded the majority.[51] In Nkrumah's Ghana, it was evident that those who had access to such privileges were members of the CPP. Nkrumah inherited the colonial state and failed to transform it into a meaningful democratic institution in the lives of ordinary Ghanaian citizens. Rather, the state was considered an instrument of nepotism and self-enrichment.

A further argument of the book is that a fundamental influence on political, economic, and social developments in Ghana between 1957 and 1966 was Nkrumah's own ideology: his conception of the world, his convictions, and his ambitions. The approach adopted is to critically examine Nkrumah's ideas and beliefs as reflected in the body of his written work and numerous speeches. He is one of the few African heads of state who has left for posterity published work.

Nkrumah's ideological perspective has not been seriously and sufficiently examined. With the exception of a handful of work—such as that of Botwe-Asamoah, who tends to emphasize the cultural aspect of Nkrumah's ideology, or of Killick, who is generally sympathetic to the ideological convictions that underpinned Nkrumah's move toward "development economics," or the rather abstract work of Afari-Gyan that fails to relate Nkrumah's ideas to his performance in power—a serious examination of Nkrumah's intellectual thought is lacking.[52] The works of Poe, Botwe-Asamoah, and Rahman tend to fall into an uncritical Afrocentric examination of Nkrumah's ideology within a hagiographic tradition.[53] A critical contextual approach that fuses a discussion of ideology, political performance, events, personality, and agency into a single perspective is necessary in examining Nkrumah's life. The contention is that it is important to understand the role of political, social, and cultural beliefs in the lives of political leaders. There is a relationship between ideas as they are conceptualized, lived, and implemented. Ideology is critical in understanding political figures and what motivates individuals to act. Agyeman defines ideology as "a political belief system with a commitment either to sustain, modify, or overthrow the existing order."[54] Fundamental to Nkrumah's ideological outlook was the concept of unity. Agyeman argues that "the richness of Nkrumah's thought lies precisely in the unity of his political, philosophical and sociological ideas."[55]