

**Nkrumah’s legacy, feminism and the next generation**  
**Lecture delivered by**

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**Abstract**

This lecture challenges the narratives of postcolonial failure to argue that, Africans have accumulated valuable experiences that can lift us out of transgenerational obscurity and provide transformative lessons for the future. Among these are the legacies of Kwame Nkrumah and his vision of the interlinked nature of economic and cultural processes, and his affirmation of women’s role in African liberation. The lecture reviews Nkrumah’s intellectual legacy to argue that, aspects of this have been taken up in African feminist movements that give an afterlife to a praxis of African liberation. Characterized by transdisciplinary and activist approaches that link theory with practice, African feminism is strongest where it pursues the simultaneous transformation of political, cultural, and economic life. It is an approach exemplified in the digitally–curated, livestreamed Third Kwame Nkrumah Festival, and archived online.

**Opening remarks: the context**

Welcome to all colleagues, council members, Institute of African Studies fellows, faculty, staff and students who make up the University of Ghana community, my friends and extended family members, welcome. A special welcome to the Vice Chancellor, Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo, the Vice–Provost, the Director of the Institute of African Studies, Professor Dzodzi Tsikata, and all our distinguished guests. Thank you to every one of you, for making time to be present this event, whether in person or virtually. After almost two years of lockdown and isolation, it requires special effort to attend public events. Those with the means to do so have been compelled to embrace virtual sociality and develop new digital competencies in many spheres of our lives, be it personal

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and professional, whether we like it or not. It is a great and somewhat intimidating honour to serve as the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies at this leading African university. I feel especially privileged to be installed and invited to deliver this inaugural lecture by the University of Ghana's first woman Vice Chancellor. Let me use the opportunity to congratulate Madam Vice Chancellor, Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo on her appointment, and express my delight at the growing number of women who are moving into senior academic and administrative leadership positions in this institution.

### **Context**

At the dawn of 2022, we are two point two decades into the 21st century, after a difficult and intensely disrupted year. The multifaceted tolls exacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic and the global response to it, will perhaps never be fully comprehended. "Vaccine apartheid" has dominated the global response, echoing the realities of the reflecting global imbalances that have been continued to deepen ever since colonialism began! Those with any knowledge of Africa's history are asking why anyone is 'shocked' by the West's hoarding of vaccines? Or why the corporate elite are able to garner mega-profits from this global catastrophe? To be shocked at such venality is to be either unaware of history, or be in denial about the fact that all these should not be surprising when African liberation from colonial domination has remained an unfinished business in many respects.

Many of us are realizing that we have reached a new and difficult historical conjuncture, a revelatory moment that opens new possibilities for the pooling of all our resources towards changing the parlous situation of Africa's dispossessed majorities. The last of such moment of opportunity arose in the mid-twentieth century after the devastation of the European wars against the German Empire. For Africans, thousands of whom had been caught up in the carnage, it was time to pursue their own liberation. Europe's self-destruction saw the centre of global power shift from Europe to the US, while European allies were divided between Soviet and US spheres of influence. Projected onto the global stage as a "cold" war, between 'Communist East and Western democracy', this global frame was fought out across Africa, where the apartheid-NATO pact waged counterinsurgency struggles that consolidated neocolonialism. In the heart of the continent, the Congo crisis reflected Cold War ideological contestations that saw the West's alliance with apartheid, intervening to attack Africa's ongoing liberation struggles across the frontline states. South Africa stayed under white supremacist rule until as recently as

1994, which is more than three decades after Sudan and Ghana gained political independence (1957). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, external interests in Africa's resources have multiplied, including from transnational corporate players from Japan, China, Korea India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and many others. Transnational corporate interests compete to extract resources and profit from African nations that remain heavily indebted to such investors. The people, whose parents fought for liberation, are now subject to the accumulated anti-democratic power of their own corporate elites and the heavily monetized political systems.

In short, the global effects of the COVID–19 pandemic and responses to it have given new meaning to the term 'disaster capitalism'. The world economy contracted by 3.1% in the first year of pandemic. Yet military spending grew, as Western governments responded with 'accelerated payments to the arms industry to mitigate the COVID crisis' (SIPRI 2021). Arms industry giants were protected by Western governments, while the billionaire class accrued obscene levels of profit, and the situation of ordinary people intensified. How?

Global neoliberalism, working through local neo-colonial states, has developed to crisis-fuelled, environmentally destructive, and militarized extremes of extraction, while Africa remains subject as ever to the Western economic doctrines that have patently failed the millions of Africans living with various levels of precarity and insecurity. Africa's independent nation states, have for the most part, acquiesced to a poorly negotiated inclusion in a global neoliberal capitalist political economy that remains rigged, and its rules and regulations stacked against former colonies. For the former colonies, the 'global' free market is a space of extreme inequality, and far from free.

Africa's leading intellectuals have known this for a long time, but their legacy has been obscured by the prevailing forces. A special issue of *African Development* carrying the output of the "Post-colonialisms Today" project provides the backdrop for today's lecture. The editors observe that:

...the early post-independence era largely stands apart, in retrospect at least, as a time when policy and leadership were centred on the assertion and pursuit of political and economic agency from the hegemonic imperatives of the global North. The broad nationalist and emancipatory orientation that defined this period stands in contrast with the contemporary neoliberal era, which is characterised by a determined effort to reassert colonialist impulses, processes, and policies in African countries...

The editors point to the transgenerational problem that has developed when they describe the hegemonic 'narrative of failure' that accompanies this reassertion of colonialist impulses. They write of:

...the deliberate attempt to discredit the experience of the first two decades of post-independence development in Africa by casting it as an unmitigated failure. The World Bank even proclaimed those post-independence decades 'lost years.' The narrative of failure was constructed in a manner that sought to question the foundational principles of autonomous and autochthonous development, which was the overarching framework for the policy choices made by post-independence political leaders. (Hormeku-Ajei et al 2022)

This 'narrative of failure' devalues everything that was achieved and attempted, as African political movements struggled to bring about the decolonization, and once in power, to pursue the development interests of African people. This neocolonial discourse has pacificatory effects, propagating a mind-numbing sense of defeat that imbues successive generations, while their energies are consumed by the struggle to merely survive.

For decades, neoliberal doctrine has worked to suppress alternative narratives, denying and erasing proud histories, herstories – indeed all the stories that African freedom-lovers tell, even now. Neoliberalism has not just sustained the externalized ravaging of African economies. It has also compromised the knowledge economy, devaluing African capacities for independent thought and disabling local and regional knowledge production by Africans, according to our own agendas. Digitalization has accelerated the capture, trivialization, and commodification of the most visionary of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist intellectual legacies, obscuring the most powerful and compelling lessons that can be drawn from our recent historical experience. The androcentric-western domination of even African archives ensures that our rich, deep and complex histories of struggles waged by women, as much as men, remain obscure. In any case, the colonial archive as by its very constitution is incompatible with African epistemological autonomy and freedom, yet our national and continental archives remain in a sorry state. Demystifying the neoliberal ideology that privileges market supremacy over the sovereign power of the state, and valorises corporate profiteering over public good, is not a simple matter of class

analysis. Rather it requires more complex transnational perspectives, such as those offered by intersectional analyses that problematize the dynamics of gender, sexuality, culture and nation, that permeate the political economies and hierarchies of oppression and exploitation.

The limitations of the archive remind me of an often-cited quote from Frantz Fanon's classic book, *The Wretched of the Earth* in which he describes the end of colonialism as a discovery:

“Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity.”

More than half a century after the end of colonial rule, I ask, must every generation still discover its destiny out of opacity, as was the case in the 1960's colonial era? Have we been completely unable to accumulate knowledge and experiences gathered through decades of struggle and resistance, the many plans and projects that have been tried during decades of independence? Surely, Africans have some sense of our radical heritage of struggle, or have we failed to transmit the best of ourselves from one generation to the next, so that even the generations yet to be born will be born without history, into relative opacity?

We are all citizens of our own nations, with governments and the African Union, to call to account! We cannot afford to leave each generation to flounder without knowledge of what was achieved, and what was lost, if we wish to pursue African visions of what Africa can yet become! The interlinked nature of 'politics', 'culture' and 'economy' means that transformation requires change on all fronts. Nkrumah practiced transdisciplinary thinking, and insisted on the dynamic interconnectedness of thought with action. Disciplinary fragmentations, or failures to attend to intertwined contradictions of class, culture and gender undermine the sustainability of the worthiest changes.

African women's movements, for example, have found that whenever they push for basic rights or economic access, the powers that be invoke 'traditional culture' to re-assert men's authority over women. Examples of this include the responses to feminist movement demands for laws to prosecute intimate partner-violence, or to prohibit child marriage.<sup>1</sup> Such reactionary claims have

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1 Nigeria's women's movement struggled for decades before the Violence Against the Persons Act was passed in 2015. The federal Child Rights Act adopted in Nigerian law bans child marriage as required under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the [African Charter](#) on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. But a conflicting clause in [Section 29\(4\)\(b\) of Nigeria's Constitution](#) defines any married female as having reached the age of majority, regardless of her age at marriage.

led feminists to think critically about questions of tradition and culture, giving rise to new developments in feminist cultural theory and practice, generating outpourings of creativity that have redefined African literature, theatre and performance arts, that were once thought to be the preserve of African men.<sup>2</sup>

Today we cannot afford to allow generation after generation to be born into 'relative obscurity'. And we are not doing so. Instead, we are taking advantage of every technological innovation, and applying these to develop new ways of pursuing transmitting and sharing African knowledge and culture, and building communities of thought and action. This heralds possibilities for gathering pan-African thinkers and actors to think and work collaboratively, to confront and resist the fragmenting effects of neoliberal and neo-colonial hegemonies, and to more effectively cultivate and pursue the collective destiny that emerges out of our legacies of resistance. To pursue these possibilities, I will begin with a briefing on Nkrumah's core ideas, and then consider his position on women. To consider the afterlife of Nkrumah's ideas in Africa's feminist movement, I proceed to draw examples from the most recent Kwame Nkrumah Intellectual and Cultural Festival, digitally curated and broadcast globally on the theme "Pan-Africanism and Feminism", to address the challenges of Africa's cultural economy. I conclude that many new and radical ideas and practices are already evolving in alternative knowledge spaces, exemplified throughout African festivals and debates. I suggest that examples like these offer us the resources for collective self-liberation.

### **Nkrumah's Key Ideas.**

Not being a part of Ghana's proud history of revolutionary movements, I do not have anecdotes or direct observations, or local affiliations to add to those of the Nkrumah-ists here in Ghana. Instead, I approach Nkrumah as a visiting scholar, whose personal interest in Pan-Africanism dates to her earliest days as a student activist in London. Nkrumah survived for several years in exile, during which he wrote, broadcasted, and published, leaving us a substantial academic archives of philosophical, political and biographical writings and recordings.

Nkrumah's writings present a coherent unity of thought, spanning the disciplinary silos of psychology, history, philosophy, politics, economics, and cultural studies. His political philosophy proceeds along three interconnected

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2 Ngugi wa Thiongo, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, John Coetzee, and Abdulrazak Gurnah – arguably the best known – are all men.

themes. The first of these is anti-imperialism & Pan-African unity, in which he addresses the global equality of races on world stage, and the need for Africans to unite. The second, political liberation and the building of socialism, sees Nkrumah address the political kingdom, pointing to the necessity of self-rule, rapid education and ending class exploitation within the nation. The third major aspect of his work concerns African philosophy, in which he critically reviews Western philosophical thought and theorizes the African Personality (African genius) as a new personality that has to be forged from Africa's indigenous, Islamic and Western European heritages, later referred to as 'The Triple Heritage', by Ali Mazrui. Nkrumah was committed to the application of the latest political and scientific developments, and embraced scientific socialism, as the path to liberation from the exploitative colonial labour systems of enslavement and indentureship.<sup>3</sup> These key themes are elaborated below.

#### *Anti-imperialism & Pan-African unity*

At the global level, Nkrumah was an anti-imperialist who pursued the end of colonialism and the liberation of Africa, as the route that would make Africans take their positions on the world stage. His pan-Africanist philosophy reflected the influence of diasporan Black nationalist and Pan-Africanist ideas, which were developed through his reading of Jamaica's Marcus Mosiah Garvey, as well as his relationships with African-American WEB DuBois, and Trinidad's George Padmore and CLR James, and others (Biney, 2011). The aforementioned early 20th century men called for the unity of all Africans, and saw a strong and united Africa, taking its place as an equal on the world stage. At another level, Nkrumah's embrace of socialist political philosophy reflected his concern with transforming social relations locally, and ending exploitation that had been endured with the colonial imposition of meagre wages, taxation, and other hardships. Nkrumah wished to see Africans liberated from the racialised and classed hierarchies of colonial rule, and once freed, could transition into the more egalitarian and communal forms, drawing on indigenous legacies. To this end he was a modernist who placed great emphasis on political education as well as science and education, all of which he regarded as essential drivers in the realization of Africa's economic development.

#### *The political liberation and the building of socialism*

For Nkrumah's generation, national liberation began with the political struggle to oust the colonial regime and win political power, take over the state apparatus,

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<sup>3</sup> Nkrumah's major philosophical thesis and the concept of African Personality are laid out in *Consciencism*, published in 1964.

and use the power of sovereignty to pursue the decolonization of the economy, and re-organize and build it to benefit and develop Africans. It seemed feasible, given the political conjuncture Nkrumah described as follows:

“The whole continent is ablaze with the fire of nationalism. This great giant Africa, which was anaesthetized for so long, is now awake and has shaken itself out of the slumber that for so many years enabled exploiters and marauders to plunder its wealth. The new African has arrived on the scene. Colonialism and imperialism are on the run, fleeing from the blows of African irredentism.” (Kwame Nkrumah<sup>4</sup>)

Taking over state power was therefore a means to this end, but not an end in itself. In his writings, he shares the story of that struggle, and the efforts to sabotage it (including as many as seven assassination attempts). However, this was only the first stage. In Nkrumah's view:

“Once freedom is gained, a greater task comes into view. All dependent territories are backward in education, in agriculture and industry. The economic independence that should follow and maintain political independence demands every effort from the people, a total mobilization of brain and manpower resources. What other countries have taken three hundred years of more to achieve, a once dependent territory must try to accomplish in a generation if it is to survive... (or ) risk everything for which is has fought for.” (Nkrumah 1957)

For Nkrumah a scientific approach, namely scientific socialism, offered the most feasible route to economic liberation. However, the Western colonial powers had other ideas. Aside fearing loss of access to the enormous wealth, they were accustomed to extracting. They also viewed all African liberation movements as Soviet conspiracies, rather than as honest struggles for self-rule and decolonization. Determined to retain supremacy, the Western powers branded African anti-colonial nationalists as “communists”, and sponsored counter-revolutionary and mercenary groups as proxies, while openly supporting the apartheid regime and counterinsurgencies, leading to the assassination of the

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4 Nkrumah's address to the Conference of the Women of Africa and African Descent on July 18, 1960, Accra.



Congo's democratically elected President, Patrice Lumumba, among other casualties. A series of counter-revolutionary coup d'états and prolonged national liberation struggles in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola and South Africa cost thousands of lives.

Once the national 'political kingdom' had been won, the CPP faced difficult challenges, because industries and commerce were still largely foreign-owned, and extractive, which was found to be an extreme exploitation of African labour in a system entrenched through centuries of enslavement, indentureship and colonial rule. Nkrumah's strategy for decolonizing the economy drew on scientific socialism, which aspired to an internally integrated and people-centred economy owned and controlled by Ghanaians. For Africans to be free, he thought, we should "produce what we consume and consume what we produce" to liberate ourselves from colonial dependencies and desires reflected in the self-alienating preference for foreign things. Socializing the economy would end exploitation of labour and use the latest industrial and technological developments to ensure more efficient production in a local economy, in which production and consumption would be based on the resources and needs of the local populace, rather than on externally oriented extractivism.

He saw the rapid acquisition of economic sovereignty as imperative to prevent neocolonialism, introduced as 're-colonization by other means'. His detail analysis led him to conclude that:

If Africa's multiple resources were used for her own development, they could place her among the modernized continents of the world. But her resources have been, and still are being used for the greater development of overseas interests. (Kwame Nkrumah, 1965, *Neocolonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism*)

Nkrumah's efforts to put anti-colonial ideas into practice inevitably pitted him against the private financial interests of transnational corporations, which was commanded by what he describes as a 'powerful international confraternity'. The power and influence of these protagonists were such that Nkrumah became even more convinced that only a united Africa could free itself.

Secondly, he saw it as the state's responsibility to drive national economic development and industrialization. State marketing cooperatives would protect local producers from commodity market fluctuations, and state farms would ramp up efficiency of production. However, the raising of so many independent African flags led the imperialists to adjust their strategy:

‘..imperialism, having quickly adapted its outlook to the loss of direct political control, has retained and extended its economic grip (and thereby its political compulsion) by the artfulness of neo-colonialist insinuation (p33)

Nkrumah's grand vision was epitomised in the Volta River Project, which the CPP made massive investments. Also, a new harbour was constructed at Tema, and the Akosombo Dam Project was constructed to provide electricity for new industries and factories. Agricultural diversification sought to reduce Ghana's single-crop dependency on cocoa, to overcome the subjection of Ghana's economic fortunes to world market pricing. The story of the Volta River Project—the cornerstone of his planning—is a disturbing example of the complex networks of forces that he was up against.

In *Neocolonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism*, Nkrumah provides a dossier on some of his encounters with powerful transnational corporations, the 'global confraternity' of tightly networked and secretive international capitalists that included the gargantuan Oppenheimer empire, the Anglo American Corporation, as well as those extracting diamonds, gold, tin, aluminium and diamond, and many other intertwined interests. He details the mechanisms of neocolonialism, by highlighting the increased use of intelligence and ideological propaganda and mass media to consolidate their hold. Realizing the sophistication of their operations, he saw the necessity of developing local print and electronic media, and mass education systems capable of counteracting misinformation campaigns, and building national awareness.

According to Ama Biney,

The role of education was central to the success of Nkrumah's economic policies. Not only did he consider it key to educate a competent and technically skilled workforce, but also Nkrumah believed that Ghanaian citizens had to understand and share the ideology of the CPP in order to effect a second economic and social revolution in the country. Nkrumah's vision of education was thoroughly ideological (Biney, p. 101).

The importance afforded to education was reflected in the introduction of free public education for all citizens. Also, thousands of schools were built to train both girls and boys for the future development of Ghana and the African continent as a whole. Education and technology were seen as essential for

industry, and Nkrumah saw rapid industrialization as a major route to development.

The Accelerated Development Plan for Education (1952) led to huge increase in number of primary and secondary school. The 1961 Education Act made education compulsory and led to dramatic increase in the enrolment of girls. By 1966 girls were already 44% of primary school enrolments, 35% in middle school and 25% in secondary school. (Biney p. 101).

Aside from the schooling system were also numerous colonial youth and women clubs that had been established to convey patriarchal–colonial Christian values. Nkrumah’s government therefore established two other entities. The Young Pioneers Movement (YPM) began in 1960, which was set up to educate and train the youth to eradicate the colonial mentality, and equip them with skills. By 1962, the YPM had 5,000 branches all over the country, with a total membership of 500,000, of which 190,000 (38%) were women. By 1963, the YPM had over a million members. There were criticisms led by local churches, which condemned Nkrumah and the YPM for ‘blasphemy and godlessness’ (Biney p. 102). Conservatives and traditionalists also objected to co-educational schools and youth training camps.

The Ideological Institute was a school, established at Winneba by the CPP in 1961, to train the leadership cadre as well as the ancillary wings of the CPP. The army were also required to take regular courses of study on CPP ideology, which was a response to the fact that “few fully understood Nkrumah’s political and social philosophy” (Biney). Nkrumah also convened a CPP study group called “Building a Socialist State,” in 1961, and required all sections of the party leadership and auxiliary orgs to attend.

### *Philosophy*

Nkrumah was more of a political philosopher than a cultural theorist—as his primary concern was to purge Africans of the colonial mentality, and all its trappings, including colonially–inscribed versions of ‘African customary law’. He envisaged a new African culture, not in terms of restoring past precolonial traditions, rather as a new synergy that would build on the best of Africa’s “triple heritage”. The new African was to project this new collective identity — *The African Personality* — on the world stage. His confidence in the vast and untapped intellectual and creative talent of African people was reflected in his concept of *African Genius*.<sup>5</sup>

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5 The title of Kwame Nkrumah’s speech at the University of Ghana, Legon, on October 25, 1963 at the launching of the Institute of African Studies.

Nkrumah's philosophy is laid out in his most academic and philosophical book *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-colonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution*. He critically reviews the major schools of Western philosophy, before elaborating the theory of consciencism, which departs from the Western canon in his insistence on the relevance of philosophy to social life.

“Practice without thought is blind. Thought without practice is empty” (*Consciencism*, 1964)

Nkrumah regarded indigenous African society in grand generalization, as fundamentally egalitarian and communal, and therefore more compatible with socialism than with the exploitative, hierarchical labour relations and possessive individualism at the heart of capitalist societies.<sup>6</sup> However, colonial African society needed to be transformed, and a new society created, in the face of the real and urgent threat of neocolonialism. Could this be achieved in a single generation? Nkrumah's educational policies, therefore, reflected the sense of urgency he felt at the helm a nation left in a parlous state. He could not afford to leave matters to change, hence he directed much effort to information and training that was not only limited to acquiring technical skills, but also building public awareness of the political philosophy and vision that guided his plans for Ghana and his vision for Africa.

This was the context in which Nkrumah envisaged the African University, which became the global hub of African knowledge production, in the service of the African revolution. In this spirit, he invested in building Ghana's university sector, as well as establishing new training and research institutions. For example, he supported the establishment of the Institute of African Studies (IAS) and tasked it to pursue a pan-African knowledge agenda. At the time, it seemed quite feasible for Africa to be the global centre of African knowledge, and that diasporan Pan-Africanism would finally find its most revolutionary possibilities in the African revolution, which took place on the Mother continent. Ironically, since the 1960's, numerous centres of African Studies have been set up in the West to pursue Western academic and policy interests. In the USA for example, African Studies is sponsored by the US government. Meanwhile, on the African continent itself, African research remains under-resourced, and dependent on limited access to Western funding. Yet many Africans remain committed to build up Africa's knowledge infrastructure, and populate it with

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<sup>6</sup> See for example [C. B. Macpherson, \*The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke\*, 1962.](#)

African intellectuals who are committed to the pursuit of African knowledge agendas.

However, today's pan-Africanists face a complex reality, in which revolutionary discourse and the possibilities pan-Africanism holds for Africa's oppressed and exploited majorities continue to be obscured, and subjected to various appropriations by neocolonial and neoliberal actors,<sup>7</sup> as well as by African presidents with no vision beyond dependency on foreign aid and foreign investment. Interestingly, many of these neocolonialists invoke idealist and nostalgic versions of African civilizations and vibrant African rhythms, but evade any consideration of the material realities that objectively manifest in Africa's dismal economic performance. Indeed, it is as if Fanon's ascerbic critiques of negritude and "negroism" were never written. Perhaps our leaders do not read, or simply fail to understand just how pertinent the ideas of anti-colonial revolutionaries are regarding the crises of the present? (Fanon 1965).

The revolutionary rule of the Convention People's Party was short-lived, but Kwame Nkrumah left an enduring political and intellectual tradition. His revolutionary leadership also facilitated the emergence of a new kind of African women. These included political leaders like Hannah Kudjoe, Alice Appiah, Leticia Quaye, Ama Nkrumah and Sophia Doku. He also inspired intellectuals and artists like journalist Mable Dove, and the multi-talented playwright, director, author and publisher Efuia Theodora Sutherland. Nkrumah's women supporters were women who refused to be distracted by the frocks and fripperies of British colonial femininity, and they have left an enduring legacy.

### **Nkrumah's Feminist legacy**

To discuss Kwame Nkrumah's feminist legacy is not about making spurious claim. I am not implying that the man was himself a feminist. There is anecdotal and biographical evidence that at a personal level, he was not. In his texts, Nkrumah-the-man writes with the conventional authoritative male voice, using the generic masculine "I", and on the global stage he demanded full equality for "the African man". However, we know from his principled insistence on the equality of all people, that his intention was to include women, and this is borne out of his political practice. He makes little reference to his many women supporters, rarely mentioned any of them individually. Not even his national propaganda secretary, Hannah Cudjoe, is named in his biography. The only woman who is mentioned is the ardent Ama Nkrumah, who publicly slashed her face with a knife and took his

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7 President Senghor played this role. In recent months, President Macron of France promotes a French discourse on Africa, mobilizing 'African Youth' for La Republique (in keeping with the policy of assimilation) with assistance of prominent African intellectuals, while Africans in France face severe discrimination, and the anti-colonial discourse is suppressed as 'racist'.

name! Future researchers might also consult the biography of his English private secretary and ghost-author, Erica Powell in this regard.

Nkrumah is said to have loved and respected the mother who raised him, but I suspect his formative encounters with pan-African feminists during his time in the Diaspora may also have influenced his view of women. At the time, modern African feminism had yet to come into its own, as an autonomous movement of women, pursuing liberation as this did not emerge until the late 1970's, that is, after Nkrumah's death. Nkrumah would not have therefore been privy to the socialist feminist theorizations of gender advanced by African women, who insisted that gender mattered as much as class and nation, during the 1970's. The Association of African Women in Research and Development, AAWORD/AFARD, the first continental research network of anti-colonial African feminists was not formed until the late 70's, eight years after Nkrumah's premature transition at sixty-two years of age. It is therefore in the aftermath of the Nkrumah's era that feminist movements have proliferated across the African continent. There is also a global tradition of Black feminist organising that includes the African diaspora.<sup>8</sup> In Ghana, key authors trace feminism to the militant legacy of Yaa Asantewaa. They point to the famous roles played by market women who supported Nkrumah and the CPP. The state machineries for women in all the independent nations can be traced to the establishment of women's wings in the nationalist parties. Nowadays some of us are critical of the state's bureaucratization of women's movement demands, but there are also vibrant non-state pan-continental and transnational feminist networks that link women across the formerly colonized world. To be clear, African feminism is not something that sprung up overnight, rather a legacy of women's involvement in anti-colonial and nationalist movements. For example, photojournalist Stephanie Urdang (1979) documented freedom fighters in Guinea-Bissau, and later in Mozambique, describing their struggle as being against "dual oppression", as women and as Africans. The interconnectedness of oppressions identified by socialist feminists internationally is nowadays reflected in contemporary feminist thought, including African feminist theory (see e.g. Dosekun 2019).

The political mobilization of women in Ghana can be seen as a legacy of the Nkrumah-era, and it is reflected in the movement's demand for affirmative action,

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8 In the UK the first ever issue of the journal *Feminist Review* to be edited by Black feminists was 'Many Voices, One Chant: Black feminist perspectives', *Feminist Review* 17, 1984, but the Black Women's movement newsletter *Speak Out* dates back to 1980. In the USA, the Combahee River Collective issued the 'Black Feminist Statement' in 1979, and Angela Davis's book *Women, Race and Class* was published in 1982, and new sources on women and Black Nationalism (see Joseph-Gabriel 2020, Blain 2018, Blain and Gill 2019, Higashida 2013)

to restore women to political and public life.<sup>9</sup> To do justice to Nkrumah's legacy would surely require a willingness to reform and upgrade the patriarchal and monetized systems that keep women politically weak and marginalized. Ghana's national machinery should also be understood as a legacy of Nkrumah's CPP government, which established the National Council for Women and Development almost three decades before the creation of a state machinery became a global policy, advanced by the Nairobi Conference at the end of the first Decade for Women in 1985. The efficacy (or lack thereof) of the today's Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs regarding the development of Ghanaian women therefore reflects the seriousness with which his legacy is being taken by the Government of Ghana.

Feminism is not typically so much a grassroots insurrection (although these do happen), as a global epistemological intervention, complete with political theory, analytics and methods that make visible the historical and material conditions of women's subordination, and the transnational similarities and differences in gender relations across locations, cultures and his/herstories. In Africa, as elsewhere, feminist intellectual energies have advanced research into new areas, and developed radical pedagogic strategies and methods for developing pan-African curriculums and methodologies under the teaching rubric of gender and women's studies. In today's African university, over 50 gender and women's studies units turn out hundreds of graduates, master's and doctorates, equipped with feminist tools and methodologies every year. Perhaps, even more pervasively, feminist popular education, training and mentoring have energetically being pursued by women's organizations since the 1980's. The early 2000's saw an up-tick in continental networking that set out to bridge the structural separation of feminist who become scholars and those who work in feminist movements and NGO's. African feminists have also been on the forefront of digital activism, using the latest technology to build and strengthen such efforts. Two expressions of this resurgent continentally-focused feminism are: *Feminist Africa*, the gender studies journal published since 2002 (and now hosted at the Institute of African Studies) and the *African Feminist Forum*, initiated in Accra in 2006.<sup>10</sup>

These developments in African women's movements and the corpus of work, constituting a continental feminist intellectual tradition, clearly does more than reflect key aspects of Nkrumah's pan-African political and educational philosophy. The African feminism of today is pan continentalist, which favours the autonomous organizing of women by women, and produces new knowledge

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9 See the Ghanaian Women's Manifesto (2016) available at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ghana/02983.pdf>

10 The African Feminist Charter produced by the African Feminist Forum can be found here: <https://awdf.org/the-african-feminist-charter/>

grounded in Africa for Africans. To ensure the sustainability of their work in the face of government's disinterest and donor interests, African feminists have gone far as to established a funding infrastructure to redress the gross global under-resourcing of women and women's movements, of which the apex organization is the African Women's Development Fund, headquartered in Accra.<sup>11</sup>

Nkrumah's thinking was influenced by the Black nationalist movements of the early 1900's and the Ethiopianist churches he visited in Harlem.<sup>12</sup> During the 1930's he was in touch with international socialists of the diasporan pan-Africanist movement, where he found common cause with the likes of WEB DuBois, Caribbean radical anti-colonialists, CLR James and James Padmore, among others. Less is known about his contact with Black left feminist, Amy Ashwood Garvey, but he certainly met and discussed with her, as she co-organized the Manchester Pan African Congress with WEB DuBois. He clearly encountered her and other Black anti-imperialist and communist women in Britain, such as Claudia Jones. One wonders if he also knew Nigerian socialist feminist, Mrs Kuti, whose article 'We Had Equality till Britain Came' was published in the British *Socialist Worker?* (Kuti 1947). It has already been established that his exposure to diasporan radical traditions exposed him to socialist political philosophy. His wide reading surely included Marx and Engel's critique of the patriarchal family as a key institution sustaining the European capitalist-colonial exploitation of labour (Engels 1854). Who were the black left pan-Africanist women that might also have influenced his political thought?

#### *Early Pan-Africanist Women*

A personal favourite is Amy Ashwood Garvey, the militant Jamaican pan-Africanist socialist feminist who lived in London at the same time as Nkrumah, during the 1930's and 1940's. Amy Ashwood's pan-African journey began in her turn-of-the-century childhood, during which her formerly enslaved grandmother, named Boahemaa, shared memories of her capture. She told the young Amy of a personal lineage that placed her ancestors in Dwaben ("Juaben"), somewhere in Ghana, leading her to identify with Africa at an early age. At 17 and already an anti-colonial activist, Amy Ashwood fell for the much older, but highly charismatic

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11 The African Women's Development Fund ([www.awdf.org](http://www.awdf.org)) and the newer Black Feminist Fund attend to the funding of women's movements in the region. The global association, AWID monitors the very low amount of international funding going to women and their organizations and has published several strategy papers ([www.AWID.org](http://www.AWID.org)).

12 Garveyism was the largest ever mobilization of Black people globally, as millions joined the UNIA, 2/3rds of them women.



pan-Africanist, Marcus Josiah Garvey, and together they co-founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association.<sup>13</sup>

Between 1938 and 1945 Amy Ashwood ran the Florence Mills Social Parlour and International Afro-Restaurant in West London. This became a regular salon that drew many radical African and Caribbean political intellectuals. It served as the venue for meetings of the anti-imperialist International Friends of Ethiopia, and the International African Service Bureau, which she established along with George Padmore, Sam Manning, and CLR James. The International African Service Bureau was frequented by students and visitors from Africa, including Kwame Nkrumah. It was at Amy Ashwood's parlour that the Fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester, 1945 was discussed and organized. She was one of only two women speakers, and also chaired the opening session of this historic Congress, the first to be attended by continental Africans. Among them were several men, who like Nkrumah, would become the leaders of new nations (Azikiwe 2016). After the 1945 PAC in Manchester, Ashwood Garvey was able to pursue long-awaited journey to Ghana. Friends helped her trace the community of Dwaben (Juaben), where she met relatives. Notably, the second among Pan-Africanist women of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was the Sierra Leonean Adelaide Casely-Hayford, the "Victorian Feminist", subject of several biographies (Cromwell 1986). Casely-Hayford led the Freetown chapter of the UNIA for several years before founding a vocational school for young women, where she ran a pan-Africanist curriculum for African women, concerned with equipping them with both cultural dignity and vocational skills for economic independence. The colonial and androcentric design of most of the archival resources on Africa has obscured historical evidence of many of the women involved in the early nationalist and pan-Africanist movements, especially on the continent. We do not know for example, if Nkrumah met other radical Black women like Una Marson or Claudia Jones, in London too, or if he was familiar with the French black internationalist women like Jean Nardal and her sister Pauline.

#### *Political praxis– inclusion of women*

At the national level, Nkrumah brought women into politics and government to a degree where it was significantly forward-looking for the mid-twentieth century. His discourse on women's emancipation responded to a political reality of the Ghanaian-working women's mass support for the struggle. Was he being principled or merely pragmatic in this? The inclusion of women took place alongside the broader centralization of power in the state, hence the CPP

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13 Reddock Rhoda (2007) "[The first Mrs Garvey and others: Pan-Africanism and feminism in the early 20th Century British colonial Caribbean.](#)" *Feminist Africa* 19 (2014): Pan-Africanism and Feminism

government brought all the existing independent women's organizations under the umbrella of a single national structure, that is, the National Council for Women and Development (NCWD), as part of his central government.

Nkrumah invited a previous woman leader, Evelyn Amarteifo, to work with Hannah Cudjoe—CPP stalwart—to organize a high-profile international Conference for Women of Africa and the Diaspora (CWAAD) in 1960, probably the first of its kind. In his opening address as President of Ghana, he underlined the importance of women in Africa's liberation struggle and called on them to mobilize their men as well as themselves.

“What is woman's part in the great struggle for African liberation? You have to provide an answer to that question. But I can say something of the role adopted by Ghanaian womanhood in the past. The women of Ghana have played a most glorious part in our struggle for independence. They were solidly behind the Ghana revolution. Guided by the Convention People's Party, thousands of our women flocked to the nationalist banners and, side by side with the men, fought heroically until freedom was achieved for Ghana.”  
(Nkrumah, CWAAD Opening July 1960, Accra)

Takiywa Manuh (1991) notes how decades before affirmative action had been invented, Nkrumah provided for the election of women to the National Assembly, reflecting his desire to have women participate in national affairs at the highest levels of his government. As early as 1951, the CPP had appointed Mrs Leticia Quaye, Madam Sophia Doku, Mrs Hannah Cudjoe, and Madam Ama in the prominent role of National Propaganda Secretaries, with the responsibility of mobilizing the nation for the CPP. The CPP also established women's wings at the various party branches in the country. Manuh observes that Nkrumah “catapulted women onto the political scene in a way that was new both for Ghana and Africa”, noting that both the 1959 the Representation of the People (Women Members) Act and the subsequent 1960 Act made provision for women's seats. Ten women were elected as parliamentarians as at the time of the sitting of the first Parliament in 1960; several other women were appointed as District Commissioners, and one as a Deputy Minister. Many more were sent to overseas to acquire training in much needed skills for national development, notably medicine, law, dentistry, education and public administration, which created a strong cadre of women supporting nation-building (Manuh 1991).

However, there is evidence that Nkrumah was ahead of his time, as his wish to support the advancement of women was resisted and resented, even within the senior ranks of the CPP. Tawia Adamafo, General Secretary of the CPP, was not enthused when requested to work with the women's movement to organize the 1960 CWAAD. He shared his anxieties in his autobiography:

“The Party women's solidarity was so all-inclusive when organized, that nothing could escape its steam-roller pressure. The Party women could not be bullied into submission by any party leader including Nkrumah himself on any matter ... If necessary the women did not hesitate to boo me or any other leader for that matter, and cause severe embarrassment and confusion to achieve their objective ... No, I cannot adequately convey to you an expression of the actual difficulty involved in organizing women, but if you could imagine their gossip, bitter quarrels and bickering and the acrimony of the lashing tongues, you would be getting nearer the truth than I could describe. I did not cherish this new task at all.” (Adamafo 1982).

According to him, male members of the party and trade union movement shared his concerns:

“We foresaw a situation where this NCGW [National Council of Ghana Women] would grow so monolithic and powerful that the party could lose control of it. When you had its leadership bristling with dynamic women intellectuals and revolutionaries and the organization had become conscious of its strength, it could break off in rebellion, form a party by itself and sweep everything before it at the polls. The ratio of women voters to men then was about three or more to one and the position could well arise, where Ghana would be ruled by a woman President and an all-woman cabinet, and the principal secretaries and Regional Commissioners were all women and men would be relegated to the back room! It would be disastrous for Ghana, for, I could see men being ridden like horses! A male tyrant could be twisted round a woman's little finger. An Amazonian tyrant could only probably be subdued by a battery of artillery!”

We might be amused by this fearful attitude, were it not for the fact despite women's enthusiastic participation, such retrograde views are still evident in many political quarters, and not just in Ghana! Nkrumah was ahead of his countrymen and Western nations at the time, but he was not alone. His views on women's role in the struggle were shared with other revolutionaries, notably the international socialist CLR James, who was so impressed by what he saw, and wrote that:

“In the struggle for independence, one market woman ... was worth any dozen Achimota graduates...” (CLR James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, 1977).

Nkrumah's gender politics were clearly more advanced than the military men who came after him, as well as the current government of Ghana. He understood and frequently observed that the economic and social transformation of Ghana and Africa would require the mobilization of women, as well as the youth, workers, and farmers, and indeed all sectors of the society.

### *Education*

The most pervasive changes in women's status are likely to have accrued from the sweeping national educational and youth policies of the CPP government. Women were major beneficiaries of free elementary education for all Ghanaians, free textbooks and a significant expansion of the university system during the 1960's and 1970's. Following his mentor, Aggrey, Nkrumah emphasized the importance of educating women, in keeping with his view that “educating women meant educating the whole nation.”

Since Nkrumah's time, feminists have developed a whole new fields of teaching and research, generating a large corpus of scholarship, methodologies, pedagogies, curriculums and educational resources that demystify and challenge the patriarchal and colonial underpinnings of African knowledge production. Feminist academics have founded gender and women's studies programs in over 50 African universities, between 1979 and now, as well as generated local research, journals that bridge theory and practice, and research publications, all designed to overcome field reliance on the Western sources. Like Nkrumah, African feminists pursue education as a strategy for political conscientization. Education is seen as the main route to awareness, mobilization, and transgenerational movement-building for the future, much as Nkrumah did. The building of thousands of schools, and the introduction of co-education rapidly expanded young women and girls' access to education, all the way up to the university level, and has left a lasting legacy to date.

In reality, the University of Ghana never excluded women, yet it would remain a male-privileging institution for many decades. In her research on the University of Ghana, Dzodzi Tsikata observed:

“While there was never any doubt that the University of Ghana would be coeducational, both its antecedents and early practices marked it as a profoundly male space concerned with the creation of modern African masculinities. The low numbers of female faculty have improved slowly. In the 1970s, the faculty was still largely male even in the subjects which attracted female students.” (Tsikata 2007, p30).

I think it is safe to say that 60 years later, Nkrumah would have welcomed women’s critical engagement, and our Vice Chancellor’s appointment. He might wonder why it took so long and ask for Prof Tsikata’s research report. I strongly suspect he would urge the VC to increase the number of women not only in senior administrative positions, but also in the senior academic and research positions that generate knowledge.

#### *Economic vision*

There is little evidence that Nkrumah planned to change the unequal gender division of labour, something that is central to post 1970’s socialist feminist analyses of women’s subordination. He did intend to build a new socialist economy, and pursued his grand vision of modernization with large scale projects, notable are the building of Tema Harbour, the Akosombo Dam, and other significant infrastructures for the nation he envisaged. His overthrow was accompanied by the dis-establishment of many of the structures he established and the discrediting of his entire political agenda as some kind of Soviet conspiracy. The spectre of “communism” was used by the West to subvert Nkrumah’s anti-colonial agenda, with the assistance of the patriarchal and colonial military.

By the 1970’s, African feminists were among those who became critical of the capitalist modernization approaches that superseded plans for building socialist economies in the service of the liberated nations. Modernization approaches have been the subject of much critique from Africa’s political economists, (Amin 1973, Mkandawire and Soludo 1991) but it was left to feminists to protest the marginalization of women in the mainstream approaches to development. There pursued industrialization and agri-business in a manner that was focused on extracting male waged labour, and largely excluded women from the benefits of modern tools and production factors. Modernization also

burdened rural households with additional labour in the process we refer to as the 'feminization of poverty.' Feminists have therefore found particular grounds for resisting the male-bias in Western neocolonial approaches to economic development, highlighting the centrality of the women's exploitation in the capitalist division of labour. These days, a new generation of African feminist economists have been organizing and challenging the current policy discourse and utilizing digital media to advocate alternatives.<sup>14</sup>

### *Pan-Africanism*

Ghana's liberation from British rule excited the entire African world, as well as international socialist movements. Nkrumah drew support from a wide range of people internationally, including allies on the British left, some of whom he appointed to be part of his government. For example, his first Attorney-General, Geoffrey Bing, and his trusted private secretary, Ericka Powell were both British. Ghana also became home to many African-Americans, such as WEB and Shirley Graham DuBois. Such eminent Black radicals led the way for many others to travel to Ghana to seek refuge from the existential tolls of racism and anti-communist political persecution by the House Committee on Un-American Activities from 1938 onwards. Among those affected were Paul Robeson, Claudia Jones, and Jackie Robinson, as well as DuBois himself. Interestingly, while very few of the US citizenry know what 'communism' actually is, it is known that they are very much against it. Indeed, words like "socialism" and "class struggle" are hardly ever uttered in the USA these days, as they have been effectively euphemized into public discourses on "social justice" and "diversity management". The US 20th century preoccupation with "anti-communism" has been somewhat superseded by the 21st Century "Global War on Terror"<sup>15</sup> but anti-communism continues to be a salient political trope.

In summary, Nkrumah's anti-imperialist, anti-racist pan-Africanism began in the diaspora and sought to situate Africa and Africans as equal to Europe and Europeans on the world stage. On the continent, his pan-Africanism was about political, economic, and cultural decolonization, and the socialist transformation of African societies into a more egalitarian and communal form which would centre the interests of Ghana's working people. He believed that a socialist path would better resist the encroachments of Neocolonialism. Nkrumah considered

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14 For example the Feminist Economic Recovery Statement issued in 2020: <https://femnet.org/2020/07/african-feminist-post-covid-19-economic-recovery-statement/>

15 The ongoing Global War on Terror was launched by President GW Bush following the September 11th attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. See <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/global-war-terror>

the unification of Africa imperative for the survival of the revolution, and therefore directed energy and resources into continental tours and detailed planning for unification, establishing the Organization of African Unity for the purpose in 1963. However, his grand vision was not to be realised. In the interim, the goal of African unity has made slow progress, and pan-African discourse still reflects the ideological contestations between race-nationalism and socialism that were discussed by George Padmore (1954) in the mid-twentieth century. The balkanization of continent proceeded, and to date competing external powers practice divide and rule, while African nations fail to act in concert, more than half a century after flag independence.

This is the context then, in which feminist movements seek to create unified pan-African platforms that unite women to better define and pursue their own agendas. The African Feminist Charter is just one example of an array of transnational networking strategies that echo Nkrumah's dream of African unity under present-day conditions. To do so they are able to take advantage of technological advances to overcome the constraints of distance and reach across national borders between nations with visa restrictions that curtail freedom of movement within Africa. Pan-African digitalization is therefore opening up new possibilities and providing circuitry for knowledge production and circulation, as well as for the economic and financial routings and transactions. I will end my contribution by considering some ways in which Nkrumah's radical ideas of unity and self-determination are kept alive in the hearts and minds of new generations of Africans, many of whom are feminists, and who seek to overcome divisions based on gender and sexuality.

### **Nkrumah's afterlives**

What do I mean by the "afterlives of Nkrumah"? The idea of afterlife offers us a way of discerning discursive continuities between Nkrumah's legacy of ideas and the movements that have ensued. To state that Nkrumah has an afterlife, is to posit that despite the attempts to systematically erase and suppress his vision and dismantle the institutions, cooperatives, industries and policy infrastructure he established to implement change, some elements of these survived. Nkrumah's afterlife is the living legacy which persists across generations, and informs the ideas and practices of contemporary African radical movements and communities, notably among those that define themselves, as pan-Africanists, African feminists, or indeed, pan-African feminists, in the broader cultural and political landscapes of our time.

The 2021 Kwame Nkrumah Festival, the third in the history of the Kwame Nkrumah Chair, was one among a series of gatherings constituting a pan-African

resurgence.<sup>16</sup> The theme of the third Kwame Nkrumah Festival responded to a context in which Africa's feminist movements embrace the principle of African unity, and form transnational networks that span the continent. African women have held multiple gatherings since the Nkrumah hosted the first Conference for Women of Africa and the African Diaspora (CWAAD) in 1960.<sup>17</sup> More recently, in December 2018, I was one of the many women invited to participate in the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the All African People's Conference. This memorable event was convened by Professor Tsikata, in partnership with Nkrumah's *alma mater*, Lincoln University, and held here at the University of Ghana.

The recent Kwame Nkrumah festival found many able partners, including the Africans Rising Movement. This has campaigned far and wide since the Kilimanjaro Declaration was signed in Arusha in August 2016. Their goal is to "foster an Africa-wide solidarity and unity of purpose of the Peoples of Africa to build the future we want – a right to peace, social inclusion and shared prosperity."<sup>18</sup>

The Third Kwame Nkrumah Festival was curated in 2021 during my time in residence at the University of Ghana as the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studie. I felt honored and excited by the opportunity to curate a festival that could be framed by the transdisciplinary unity of thought and action that has informed my entire career. The festival offered a way of bringing town and gown together in a way that no academic conference or talk-shop can. I proposed the theme "Pan Africanism, Feminism, and the Next Generation: Liberating Africa's Cultural Economy" as the broad rubric for a critical engagement between thinkers (from across academic disciplines, fields) and practitioners (from different communities, social and cultural movements). In keeping with materialist and feminist principles, the festival would perform and celebrate cultural wealth. It would bring the African community together across gender and generation to critically engage the material and the intellectual challenges of Africa's underdeveloped cultural economy. The term "cultural economy" was

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16 The ten-day festival is available to the public as an open access archive at [www.kwamenkrumahfestival.com](http://www.kwamenkrumahfestival.com)

17 The Pan African Women's Organization (PAWO) formed in 1962 held several pan-African gatherings, as did AAWORD, founded in 1977. Later a series of Women in Africa and Diaspora (WAAD) Conferences were held between 1991 was the first of one such series of gatherings (Nnamaeka 1996). The most recent formation is the African Feminist Forum, which has held several pan-African feminist gatherings between 2006 and 2016.

18 The Pan African Forums You-Tube channel can be accessed here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kvHQycfr7M>



selected in the revolutionary spirit of Amilcar Cabral's definition of culture, as nothing less than 'the whole way of life of the people'. For the festival it offered a dynamic and transdisciplinary approach that attends to culture, not as something rigid or fixed, but in a dynamic relation with the economy. The concept of a cultural economy was chosen to ground our thinking in reality. As such it conveys a critique the idealism and the cultural nationalism that both Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon disposed of in the 1960's. Culture is treated as a revolutionary resource for the new society emerges from the contradictions of colonialism.<sup>19</sup>

Once invited, I agreed to curate the festival on condition that it would be entirely digital. This was because I had arrived at Legon in January 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, before the availability of any vaccines, and it was clear that it would not be over in time for the event. The campus and indeed most of the world was locked down, and even the IAS Directors house was quarantined! With the corridors deserted and offices closed, I relied on wild birds and the ancient baobab trees for company, and began to use the internet as a the primary tool for curating the festival.<sup>20</sup> It is worth mentioning that the IAS capacity already included it hosting to the continent's first digital journal, *Feminist Africa* from 2017. Following that decision I recruited the IAS Director, Professor Tsikata to join me as Co-editor, to facilitate the transfer of *Feminist Africa* from its former home at the University of Cape Town's African Gender Institute. This Co-Editorship also facilitated *Feminist Africa*'s partnership with the Kwame Nkrumah festival.<sup>21</sup>

The current continental context is one in which the parlous nature of the formal economy and the deterioration of industry sees large numbers of under and unemployed youth turning to the cultural sector in their endless quest for livelihoods. Pan-African cultural festivals and intellectual discussions are advancing new forms of pan-African community that connect us across discipline, languages & cultures, time, and space. These bring light and meaning to the ongoing dynamics of African cultural production in the present. In this final section I discuss the 2021 Kwame Nkrumah Intellectual and Cultural Festival as one such event, before I conclude on the need for the more sustained

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19 Cultural nationalism is also referred to as 'nativism' (Mamdani 1991) or 'culturalism' (see Carole Boyce-Davies 2014) and associated with an uncritical theory of culture as a fixed, predetermined essence.

20 I am grateful for the experience of serving on the organizing committee of the 2020 South Feminist Futures Festival in this respect. <https://southfeministfuturesfestival.org/> and also to [Stractiv8](https://stractiv8.com/), their digital service provider <https://stractiv8.com/>

21 It is worth mentioning that the IAS capacity already included its hosting the continent's first digital journal, *Feminist Africa* from 2017. This new Co-Editorship included Prof Dzodzi Tsikata, and our role as Co-Editors facilitated *Feminist Africa*'s partnership with the Kwame Nkrumah festival.

and intentional interventions to bring our creative energies together across generations, genders, borders and parochial interests.

It was none other than Professor Esi Sutherland, Chair of annual PANAFEST, who opened the Third Kwame Nkrumah Festival. She reminded participants of the historic role Pan-African festivals and conferences have played in sustaining pan-African cultural and intellectual life beyond the elite academic arenas. Festivals have provided relatively independent forums for the sharing and celebrating of African culture, and have done since the earliest days of post-independence.<sup>22</sup> The Annual PANAFEST and FESPACO 1977 are the best known among the plethora of independent festivals, conferences, book fairs, film festivals, exhibitions and other cultural events that have taken place on the continent for decades. Festivals and cultural celebrations have become significant routes for pan-African ideational and cultural transmission because Africa's cultural infrastructure has remained weak. Even the teaching of history is sorely lacking in educational systems that might have been expected to share Africa's heritage from one generation to the next. Meanwhile the COVID-19 pandemic was already opening new vistas of possibility. The pan-African Advisory committee<sup>23</sup> was excited by the fact that global connectivity no longer needed to be limited by the realities of geography, visa requirements, and the peculiarly high costs of intra-continental travel. Africans, especially the younger generation, were already eagerly embracing social media for their own purposes and agendas, creating the vibrant constituency that we hoped to tap into with a Youth pre-festival.

The festival ran for ten days, from 15<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> September, during which time it was visited by over six and a half thousand people, located across 102 countries globally, and drew participants from 48 of Africa's 54 nations. In the ensuing 6 months (Oct 2021-March 2022) figure rose to over 30,000 unique

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22 Professor Esi Sutherland-Addy is the chair of PANAFEST Foundation, responsible for curating PANAFEST

23 The members of this PAC included 18 renowned pan-African radical intellectuals: Nancy Kachingwe (Zimbabwe), Carole Boyce-Davis (Trinidad/USA), Julia Chinyere Oparah (Nigeria/UK/USA), Fatou Sow (Senegal), Abena Busia (Ghana/USA/Latin America), Maxine Craig (Grenada/USA), Coumba Toure (Mali/Senegal) Fatma Alloo (Zanzibar), Sandra Manuel (Mozambique) Nii Kwate Owoo (Ghana) Adotey Bing-Pappoe (UK/Ghana) Thandeka Zwana (Zimbabwe/South Africa). Local and technical personnel are listed here <https://kwamenkrumahfestival.com/people-2/>

visits, and continued to grow by itself.<sup>24</sup>

The website describes the 3rd Kwame Nkrumah Festival as a:

Pan–African curation of alternative culture, ideas, and alternative ways of doing business. Our goal is to advance a new and liberating Pan–African cultural economy that will serve the material interests of Africans ... it will also be a major Pan–African experiment in digital culture, broadcast and live–streamed globally for the first time ([www.kwamenkrumahfestival.org](http://www.kwamenkrumahfestival.org)).

The digital festival set out to pursue and extend Kwame Nkrumah’s legacy to new generations of Africans:

... our objective is to pursue the basic principles of pan–Africanism bequeathed by Nkrumah and other revolutionary thinkers of his generation and extend it across the contemporary geographies of gender and generation, to galvanize a liberatory cultural economy. We want future generations of Africans to benefit materially from African cultural and intellectual ingenuity, instead of trivializing cultural products to sell to tourists or leaving them to gather mould in the vaults of Western museums([www.kwamenkrumahfestival.org](http://www.kwamenkrumahfestival.org)).

The enthusiastic response to the idea gave it wings. After over a year of lockdowns, Africans all over were eager to connect and restore a sense of self and community.<sup>25</sup> The Pan–African Advisory Committee (PAC) began the process of curation, supported by a local committee of volunteers that included the ICT and media officer at IAS. To host the multidimensional festival we envisaged, the local IT infrastructure had to be supplemented with the services of an independent pan–African digital provider, Stractiv8, which is located in Johannesburg and Nairobi. In this way we ensured that the event would proceed should there be any local power outages and connectivity problem. The result was the design and building of a customized 3–stage digital

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24 The website is open access, but the url has never been posted on the IAS institutional website, so it seems that it is circulated by individual festival participants, educators who use it for teaching purposes, and other users that happen to find it on the internet. The festival has a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=kwamenkrumahfestival>

25 Additional resources came from partnership with Africans Rising, Trust Africa, USA for Africa, the Harare–based Urgent Action Fund, the African Women’s Development Fund and the Algerian Embassy in Accra.

platform that could seamlessly and simultaneously broadcast dialogues, debates, workshops, films, music and dance performances, a digital theatre production, and other cultural expressions, as well as skill exchanges. Registered participants were able to move between the three stages, and for some sessions there was live English–French interpretation.

To preserve the event and its digital infrastructure for future festivals, video recordings of the entire 10 days were subsequently edited and converted into a digital pan–African archive, and transferred to the IAS server, with the intention that it remain freely accessible to its subscribers, and anyone who happens upon it.<sup>26</sup>

The festival archive includes a 3–day program of youth activities, curated under the slogan ‘Africa is Born in Us’, followed by a weekend film festival that screened selected pan–African films. During this we learnt of the income insecurity that young artists, performers, filmmakers, archivists, publishers and cultural producers face, and how this makes it hard to develop and realise their talent. Performing artist, Elizabeth Sutherland, expressed the sense of responsibility felt by the next generation:

“With every decision, we are all connected to building the future, whether you are doing it consciously or not. People need to balance that responsibility. We have a responsibility to do better for ourselves and for the future. We should think about what we are doing as a community. What kind of world are we building? What kind of standards are we setting? We can totally move beyond survival into thriving and it’s totally possible if we change the way we look at things and are willing to change.” (Elizabeth Efua Sutherland, [www.kwamenkrumahfestival.com](http://www.kwamenkrumahfestival.com))

The main ark of the festival pursued pan–African stories in a multiplicity of formats. Keynote lectures were delivered by Professor Esi Sutherland–Addy of the Institute of African Studies and Institute’s Director, Professor Dzodzi Tsikata, as well as the renowned Professor Fatou Sow from University Cheikh Anta Diop. Distinguished Professor Sow addressed the question, “Who and What define African Culture?”, while Professor Paul T. Zeleza addressed the challenges of liberating the cultural economy in the context of neo–colonial globalization. Plenary lectures were accompanied by several days of transnational

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26 The festival has a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=kwamenkrumahfestival>

and continental intellectual dialogues, which were led by pan-African intellectuals from radical Caribbean, US and the continental traditions, as well as powerful cultural expressions and performances. There were demonstrations of what it means to scale indigenous musical and medicinal technologies, and skill-sharing workshops presented by Cooperation Africa, while celebrations of leadership were convened by activists from Africans Rising and feminist movements, convened by the African Women's Development Fund. For ten days, the festival seethed with the energy of countless new ideas, cultural and creative performances, while intense intellectual debates and concrete exchanges took place, regarding business challenges and livelihood strategies that exist across the global African community. Altogether over two hundred independent pan-African publishers, filmmakers, pan-African and African feminist intellectuals, Black community activists, creative and performance artists and radical community archivists, cooperative organizers, researchers, and political analysts contributed to the programme. They brought a plethora of experiences, strategies, experiments, and improvisations through which African livelihoods and business enterprises continue to either survive or fail. Gcina Mhlope, South African storyteller extraordinaire, and a living embodiment of the power of sharing African stories, closed out the festival with a rousing performance. African stories, she reminded us, are not owned but must be told and retold, from one generation to the next, and to the generations yet unborn.

The festival displayed a wealth of counter-hegemonic ideas, aesthetics, scientific, legal and policy discussions, and the embodied art of African storytelling. It also exposed many participants to alternative business strategies which are being explored by the re-emergent cooperative movement, women entrepreneurs, and numerous artists and creatives of all ages.

In conclusion, let me return to Nkrumah, to observe that he embarked on multiple cultural and intellectual interventions designed to facilitate the emergence of New Africans – the self-defining historically, culturally and politically mature and informed people of his vision. He foresaw that we would build a new, collectively orchestrated future, informed by the lessons of the past, and that. However to do so, Africans needed to be intelligently equipped to resist new, increasingly high-tech modes of pacification. Radical training and education were core to his pan-African vision, and he established institutions dedicated to changing colonial and traditional mindsets in order to advance liberatory pan-African socialism. This has not been the core mission of the neocolonial and patriarchal African university. The ongoing seasonal festivals and events commemorating and celebrating Africa's vast cultural legacies demonstrate how his vision lives on in the ideas and actions of pan-Africanist

and feminist communities today. Nkrumah's life and work may have been interrupted and suppressed, but they have not been eradicated by any means. The recent Kwame Nkrumah Festival demonstrated that the socialist revolutionary pan-African discourses of anticolonialism, political resistance and economic decolonization have an active subaltern life among thinkers and practitioners of many kinds, and on many fronts. Well-seeded ideas can and do live on, to re-appear as sparkles against the dense and troubling firmament of present.

It also reminds us that the "African genius" is not inborn or God-given, but can be cultivated through the agency of our collective will, by teaching, training and learning, guided and nurtured by the revolutionary pan-African curriculum of the people, and the creation of pan-African people's archives. These tasks are the responsibility of African educators and change-makers, and the institutions they serve.

I cannot conclude without thanking the IAS Director, Prof Tsikata and her team, the local festival organizing committee, the international pan-African advisory group, and the digital pan-African team at Stractive8, and all our partners for their support. It was this that made the festival an uniquely pan-African digital success.

Thank you to the installation organizing committee for this remarkable event. Thank you all for your kind attention.

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