

The Lure of the Image in the Mirror: A Reading of Kwame Nkrumah's *Towards Colonial Freedom*

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Submitted: May 18, 2016 / Accepted: July 2, 2016 / Published: May 31, 2017

Abstract

Nkrumah's *Towards colonial freedom* is a statement on the nature of colonialism and imperialism; and a strategy for combating them. The work, cast through a nationalist framework, carries a fixation on the superstructure of colonial society to the exclusion of its economic base. Thus conceived, the anti-colonial struggle, at a superficial level, fights colonialism and imperialism. At a fundamental level, it leaves intact the structures—capitalism—that define colonialism and imperialism. Such is the trajectory that Kwame Nkrumah, in this work, traces towards colonial freedom.

Keywords: capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, mode of production, superstructure.

Placing the Author and the Text

Towards colonial freedom is Kwame Nkrumah's second published work, following his autobiography, *Ghana*, which appeared in 1959. It was written, according to the author's 'Foreword', in 1945 and published in 1962. Nearly twenty years separate the year of composition and the year of publication. The author affirms that his thinking on imperialism and colonialism, which the work examines, had remained unchanged over the near-twenty-year period.

1945 is the immediate aftermath of World War II. The period saw a resurgence of liberation struggles throughout the colonial world. Nkrumah was some two years away from his return from his passage through the US and Britain to the Gold Coast (later to be named Ghana after independence in 1957) to join and eventually to lead the struggle for independence. Nkrumah, at the thesis phase of a Ph.D. programme in philosophy at Lincoln University, in the US, found himself in London caught in an irresistible pull towards anti-colonial agitation. He gave up his doctoral studies (Nkrumah, 1959) to devote his intellectual, emotional and physical energies to the anti-colonial struggle in London and subsequently in the Gold Coast. In 1958, in the wake of Ghana's independence, Kwame Nkrumah, become a bright star of Ghana, of Africa and of the world, was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws by Lincoln University, his alma mater (Nkrumah, 1959; Powell, 1984). *Towards colonial Freedom*, produced during his years as a student in the US, represents clearly an effort to ready himself intellectually for the struggle.

Nkrumah shared, at the time, a perspective that drove what Harold Wilson, then Premier of Great Britain, famously characterised as the 'wind of change blowing through Africa' but that engaged the entire colonial world. That perspective was nationalist. The nationalists variously thought the wind they were stirring was aimed at ridding the world of colonialism and imperialism. Imperialism sought to use that wind to reformat itself applying the formula of self-determination or independence; and through wars aimed at maintaining the colonial status quo. The nationalist outlook was shared by political figures such as Mahatma Ghandi and Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Sukarno of Indonesia, Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, Abdul Gamel Nasser of Egypt, Sékou Touré of Guinea, Modibo Kéita of Mali, not to leave out so-called moderates of the ilk of Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, Houphouët-

Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kamuzu Banda of Malawi.

The nationalist perspective, as is known, is populist. It assumes the shared identity of oppressed colonial peoples propelled against their colonising oppressors also seen as wearing a single classless identity. The perspective targets abuses of governance; but also assorted apologies of the colonial system generated around the supposed cultural and racial inferiority of colonised peoples. Racial prejudice and related frameworks are, in reality, mental constructs emanating from, and protective of, the capitalist economic base. These cannot be effectively fought without relating them to the colonial (which is to say) capitalist economic base of which they are a reflection. Nationalism does that. It loses sight therefore of the real nature of colonialism.

Leaders of the nationalist movements, in search of radical colouring, borrowed, every now and then, concepts from Marxism, which they did not use in any consequent manner, combating capitalism in favour of socialism. *Towards colonial freedom* functions within this nationalist colouring.

The work seeks to characterise the phenomenon of colonialism and to propose a strategy for fighting it. We fit our reading of it within the materialist conception of history and the theory of imperialism that Lenin develops out of it.

Theory

Frederick Engels, in a speech at the graveside of his life-long friend, political comrade and intellectual companion, Karl Marx, affirmed: 'mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.' (Engels, 1962, p. 167). The position of Engels was informed by the materialist conception of history, also known as historical materialism, which conceives of human society as characterised by two sets of activities that engage the humans who inhabit it. These are activities of production of the material means of life; and mental activities or reflection or thinking. On the basis of this, the materialist conception of history conceives of human society as having two essential components: a mode of production (of the material means of life); and a superstructure. The superstructure is the world of mental activities, ideas and their application in science, technology, art and social institutions. The superstructure arises out of, is conditioned by, the mode of production. The mode of production draws its identity from, is characterised by, the mode of ownership of means of production named also as production relations or property relations.

Means of production, the unit of production, is made up of raw materials (object of labour) and tools/machines (instruments of labour). Qualitative changes that occur in society are identified by changes that occur in the mode of ownership of means of production. Ownership of means of production is either public (as in a communalist, classless society) or private (as in a class society). Thus the qualitative change that occurred in the first human effort at constructing a society, communalism, was marked by the passage from communal, public, ownership of means of production to private ownership of means of production. This change gave rise to social classes, to struggles between them and to the State as an instrument of class domination. Re-configurations of the private mode of ownership of means of production have given rise to qualitatively different societies. These are slave, feudal and capitalist societies. This way of conceiving of social change led Engels to assert, in *Socialism: Utopian and scientific* that the history of the world since the disintegration of communalism has been the history of class struggles leading to qualitative phases in social evolution, marked, each one, by a reconfigured mode of appropriation of means of production (1962, p. 134).

What we retain from the foregoing is that the mode of production of the material needs of life, also called the economic base, the material base or the basis (of society) is the primary, fundamental component of society. The superstructure derives from it, and therefore is secondary relative to the economic base. The superstructure, the world of ideas and social institutions, is reflective of, emanates from, and is protective of, the distinguishing feature of the mode of production: the mode of ownership of means of production. The mode of production, which Marx represents also as 'the material conditions of life' (1971, p. 20), is primary, objective reality. The brain generates ideas out of this primary reality. Ideas, derived from the mode of production, constitute a subjective reality, secondary then, relative to the mode of production. Ideas, which Marx calls also social consciousness (1971, p.

20), are mental images of material conditions of life. They are NOT generated by some independent operations of the brain. Marx formulates it thus in the ‘Preface’ to *A contribution to the critique of political economy*: ‘It is not the consciousness of men [and women] that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness’ (1971, p. 21). Material conditions of life are not determined by ideas; rather, ideas are a reflection of, derive from, the material conditions of life; material conditions of life determine ideas. This follows from an earlier affirmation, still in the ‘Preface’, that ‘neither legal relations nor political forms [can] be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life’ (1971, p. 20). Ideas, as mental images of the material conditions of life, typified by the mode of ownership of means of production, attain understanding in reference to the material conditions of life of which they are a reflection.

This is saying that the struggle for social change—as in change away from colonialism—that limits itself to fighting mental processes to the exclusion of the economic base of society, which is to say, the mode of production typified by the mode of ownership of means of production, amounts to whipping the image in the mirror. The distinguishing feature of the nationalist framework is its focus on the image in the mirror that excludes, still less specifies, the defining moment of society, the mode of production typified by the mode of ownership of means of production. It is also the distinguishing feature of *Towards colonial freedom*.

Lenin constructs the theory of imperialism within the framework of the materialist conception of history. Imperialism is the product of objective social economic processes. It is capitalism having attained, as the title of the work states, its highest stage. The two stages immediately preceding it are the mercantilist and the stage of free competition. Colonialism which is a feature of imperialism is driven therefore by capitalist economic factors not by considerations of race or skin colour which translate into racial prejudice reflected in language, literature and other cultural manifestations; and yielding abuses of governance such as, exclusion from the business of government, racist discriminatory administrative practices, forced labour, pass-laws, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment...

Towards colonial freedom: The Text

Characterising Colonialism/Imperialism

Towards colonial freedom moves to characterise colonialism as a feature of imperialism. It starts with an effort at characterising imperialism in general. The effort distinguishes between modern capitalism and the imperialism of the ancient world of Greece and Rome. This is a conception that conforms to standard dictionary definitions. The work settles then to tackling modern imperialism attempting to use in places Lenin’s theory of imperialism as argued in *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* (1971).

However the outlook that dominates reflection in *Towards colonial freedom* is nationalist and therefore, falls into the subjective category, reflected in strictures against elements of the superstructure of colonialism. Above all, colonialism is perceived as driven by subjective factors. The perception leaves out the objective: the economic base of society. Thus the major missing objective indicator is the class factor in the development of capitalism leading to imperialism, one of whose features is colonialism. The class factor is indicated by the private mode of ownership of means of production. The perception in the quotation that follows picks out intentionality, the subjective, in the operations of colonialism:

Under the influence of colonial aggressive *self-consciousness* and the *belief* that in trade and commerce one nation should gain at the expense of the other, and the further *belief* that exports must exceed imports in value, each *colonial power* pursues a policy of strict monopoly of colonial trade, and the building up of *national* power. The basic notion, that of strict political and economic control, governs the colonial policies of *Great Britain, France, Belgium* and other modern colonial powers (p. 2). [emphasis added]

The ‘aggressive self-consciousness’ and also ‘the belief that in trade and commerce one nation should gain at the expense of the other’ are subjective categories. They are mental images reflective of the objective conditions of capitalism in its imperialist phase. Focusing on these is focusing on the image in the mirror: unreal. Also missing in the perception is the class factor. Imperialism, as capitalism, is the appropriation by the ruling bourgeoisie of the major means of production. Imperialism has thus, as prime mover, not entire nations but the ruling bourgeoisies of those nations. Apologies for, and rationalisation of, the colonial system, as well as nationalist rejection of them, substitute nation for class. All of them are protective of the colonial/capitalist economic base. The use of the term ‘notion’ obscures the economic determinants that drive what the text names as ‘strict political and economic control’. Besides, the designations ‘Great Britain’, ‘France’, ‘Belgium’, ‘colonial powers’ give a cover to the class interests of the ruling bourgeoisies of those countries. These class interests, it is not uncommon, may be appropriated by the class victims of bourgeois exploitation within the colonising nation state. In reality, the drive to colonise generated by imperialism serves primarily the interests of the ruling bourgeois class.

Still by way of reinforcing its characterisation of colonialism, the essay quotes Jules Ferry’s statement to the French Chamber of Deputies in 1885. The statement makes the drive to acquire colonies, again, a subjective category but not the effect of objective social economic forces. Further, it focuses on ‘nations’ and misses out on the class interests obscured by the designation ‘nations’:

The *nations* of Europe desire colonies for the following three purposes: (1) in order that they may have access to the raw materials of the colonies; (2) in order to have markets for the sale of manufactured goods of the home country; and (3) as a field for the investment of surplus capital (p. 3) [emphasis added].

Again, *Towards colonial freedom* appropriates a quote from another political representative of the French bourgeoisie, Albert Sarraut, Colonial Secretary of State in 1923, which carries a subjective representation of colonialism: ‘The origin of colonisation is nothing else than enterprise of *individual interests*, a one-sided *egotistical* imposition of the strong upon the weak. (p. 4) [emphasis added].

‘Individual interests’, ‘one-sided egotistical imposition’ are subjective categories. The driving force is, shall we repeat it, rather the development of capitalist productive forces serving primarily the dominant bourgeois class; not ‘individual interests’. Here again the objective factor is missed out in favour of the subjective, ‘individual interests’ which are no more than mental pictures of the objective reality. Sarraut’s wrongful reflection of objective reality attracts an approving comment: ‘Such is the phenomenon of European capitalist aggressiveness, one which has been rightly termed ‘colonial imperialism’’ (Nkrumah, 1962, p. 4). The use of ‘European’ again obscures the class factor; and ‘colonial imperialism’ is a tautology. This is because Lenin’s theory makes colonialism a feature of imperialism.

Chapter Two entitled ‘Colonial Economics’ attempts to characterise the operations of imperialism within the colonies. The effort yields some misunderstanding and misapplication of concepts that otherwise point to the materialist conception of history, as the following: ‘Since we feel that mercantilism—as an aspect of imperialism—is the *basis* of colonial economics, a brief history of the term is essential here. In fact, it was the next historical development of feudalism’ (p. 9).

Far from being an aspect of imperialism, mercantilism is a phase in the development of capitalism, two removes away from monopoly capitalism from which originates imperialism. Mercantilism cannot be fitted within the development of feudalism. It cannot be, at once, imperialism (i.e. capitalism) and feudalism. It does happen though within feudalism; i.e. within the framework of a predominantly feudal mode of ownership of property as means of production. The text continues its characterisation of imperialism thus:

Colonial economics may be traced through three main phases corresponding to its history. The mercantile period, the free trade period and the period of economic imperialism, all

being respectively dominated by merchant capital, industrial capital and finance capital. We are here concerned with the last phase, economic imperialism with its dominance of finance capital. (p. 11)

This could be the effect of reading Lenin's theory a bit too hastily. Lenin's theory names mercantilism, free competition and imperialism as phases *in* the development of capitalism but *not* in the development of colonialism. Imperialism is the highest phase in the development of capitalism. Colonisation occurs in this phase.

Borrowing correctly from Lenin's theory, *Towards colonial freedom* makes the re-scramble for colonies the deeper cause of World War I. This rightly makes colonialism the child of imperialism. However, a further distortion of Lenin's theory soon occurs on page 12: 'Industrial capital thus fuses with financial capital'. Lenin's characterisation of the features of imperialism fuses INDUSTRIAL CAPITAL with BANK CAPITAL to constitute FINANCE CAPITAL. It identifies monopoly capitalism's basic features as:

1. The increasingly high concentration of production and capital leading to the creation of monopolies, cartels and trusts negating the preceding phase of free enterprise capitalism;
2. Merging of bank capital and industrial capital to constitute finance capital and the creation of financial oligarchies [rule of the rich few];
3. The export of capital superseding the export of commodities;
4. The formation of international monopoly unions of capitalists which divide the world;
5. The appropriation of territories (colonisation) by the national bourgeoisies of the capitalist powers). (Lenin, 1971)

(We note quickly, in passing, Lenin's insistence pinpointing ruling classes, national bourgeoisies, as the driver of imperialism).

Clearly, the effort to characterise colonialism and imperialism in *Towards colonial freedom* hinges on inadequate hold on Marxist theory. The categories used to characterise colonialism are all subjective, including those borrowed from political and intellectual representatives of imperialism. These subjective categories as mirror images are distorted. Distorted as they are, they are traceable to physical referents which are rooted in the economic base of capitalism. The net effect is a confusing representation of colonialism and imperialism.

Way out: Towards colonial freedom

These distortions/misapplications of historical materialism are reflected in the strategy that *Towards colonial freedom* proposes for combating colonialism/imperialism. Distinctly missing in the strategy proposed is, still, the class perspective: 'The basis of colonial territorial dependence is economic, but the basis of the solution of the problem is political. *Hence political independence is an indispensable step towards securing economic emancipation*' (p. vx) [emphasis added].

The strategy is aimed at capturing State power. But what will the class base of this power be? The State is an instrument of class domination. It is an instrument that the dominant class uses to protect, enhance and perpetuate its domination. The dominant class is the class that owns the major means of production. The State, the control of which is targeted here, is the colonial State, configured to serve the interests of the class of owners of means of production in colonial Gold Coast. The class of owners of the major means of production in colonial Gold Coast is the British bourgeoisie. The State that is targeted in the effort to attain political power is thus the colonial State configured to serve the bourgeoisie that rules Great Britain. Such a State cannot meaningfully serve an independent Ghana whose class basis has to be otherwise than as under colonialism.

The misconception is reflected in the slogans that drove the nationalist movement Nkrumah led. One such was scripted on the pedestal that carried his first statue: 'Seek ye first the political kingdom'.

The statue stood in front of the very first Parliament House. It was demolished by the leaders of the CIA-orchestrated reactionary coup d'état of 1966. The slogan also echoes an idea that occurs in the last quote from *Towards colonial freedom*: 'Hence political independence is an indispensable step towards securing economic emancipation' (1962, p. vx). Economic emancipation is not captured as the end of capitalism and its replacement by socialism that ends the exploitation of one class of humans by another class of humans. There is a rider to this slogan, still playing around political power as a fundamental target: 'We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquillity'. This was carried on every issue of the *Accra Evening News*, the major organ of the Convention People's Party, edited by Eric Heyman. Still on the motif of political power (with an undefined class base as paramount) is this statement Kwame Nkrumah made on the eve of independence: 'We shall prove to the world that the black man is capable of managing his own affairs'. All of that gives a cover to the capitalist economic base which remains unscathed, especially as the political power being sought is indeed configured to serve, protect and enhance it. A firm grasp of the materialist conception of history will configure such political power away from its colonial/capitalist identity. But its re-configuration, to be meaningful, has to respond to a re-configured economic base. Colonial freedom requires thus a re-configuration of the dominant mode of ownership of the means of production. Then state power, particularly its instruments of coercion, its entire administrative machinery and related social institutions, should be smashed, at any rate reconfigured, to reflect the class interests of the working class. Lenin (1971) goes over the grounds in *The State and the revolution*.

What was the class identity of the forces that Nkrumah mobilised against colonialism? Was there an awareness of the need to determine a class basis of the struggle against colonialism? That would have required clearly identifying colonialism as capitalism. In the era of capitalism, the only class movement antithetical to the bourgeoisie is that of the working class. The nationalist movement should have been configured under the leadership of the working class. That is the only condition for aiming to smash the colonial (bourgeois) State and replace it with a working class State. An understanding of the science of social change, of historical materialism, is of course indispensable for all that. Did Nkrumah have it at the time? Clearly not. And what will 'economic emancipation' be? Did Nkrumah understand that 'economic emancipation' will be to free the productive forces from the shackles of capitalist property relations? Did Nkrumah understand that colonial freedom follows in the wake of a socialist revolution, and not just in one country? Certainly not.

International Alliance of Oppressed Nations

An important element in the strategy for achieving colonial freedom, as canvassed in the essay, is reaching out to constitute a common front with other colonial peoples in an alliance that overrides ethnic and regional differences. This gives the independence movement a shield against imperialism's weapon of divide-and-rule. But it also assumes that 'colonised peoples' as a whole, irrespective of class identity, are opposed to imperialism. It assumes especially that 'colonised peoples' are the only victims of imperialism:

This point of view irrevocably calls for an alliance of all colonial territories and dependencies. All provincial and tribal differences should be broken down completely. By operating on *tribal differences*, and colonial provincialism, the colonial powers' age-long policy of divide-and rule has been enhanced. (p. xv) [emphasis added]

The 'alliance of all colonial territories and dependencies' will include the national bourgeoisies of the colonies welded to the metropolitan bourgeoisies and therefore allies, in an objective sense, of imperialism. Worse, it excludes the teeming, formidable mass of working peoples within the colonial metropolises, victims of capitalist exploitation, therefore enemies, in an objective sense, of imperialism. A united front of working people the world over, driven by the framework for the construction of socialism, is a necessary condition for ridding the world, including the colonial/neo-colonial world, of imperialism.

In colonial Gold Coast, Nkrumah's sights, as canvassed in the quotation, were set on the broader national platform, and beyond, on all colonial peoples of the world as against the rather short-sighted politics of the rivals of his Convention people's Party, such as the Northern People's Party (NPP) and the National Liberation Movement (NLM). These shared the same populist outlook as the CPP: we against them, we victims of colonial oppression against the colonial oppressors. What distinguished the CPP was its outlook which was not just national, (with a clientele which cut across ethnicity and religious affiliations...) but projected out towards a united West Africa, indeed towards a union of the world's colonised peoples. The platform of the major rival party, the National Liberation Movement, led by Kofi Abrefa Busia, was narrow: the 'liberation' of the Ashanti Region to be secured through constituting the Gold Coast as a federation made up of autonomous units.

Thus, within the Ghanaian national environment and the still broader context of the colonised world, Nkrumah had a perspective which was distantly superior. The problem with the perspective canvassed in the quotation is that the unity achieved over the tribal differences does not identify its class composition and therefore gets hazy about the direction of the struggle. The direction of the struggle stays, as a result, within the capitalist (therefore) colonial status quo.

The point about the 1966 coup d'état that toppled the Nkrumah administration was to ensure, not a projection beyond nationalism (stuck in the colonial/capitalist status quo) into socialism, but a slide back into open embrace of neo-colonialism, i.e. continuing capitalism. Imperialist propaganda against his administration played up abuses within the superstructure—one-party-state, preventive detention, corruption. These are motifs that easily allow for the whipping up of adversarial sentiments. Attention is thus diverted away from the fundamental issue of the capitalist economic base that defines neo-colonialism against which Nkrumah battled. The hundreds of public-owned enterprises that his administration set up within the short duration of this administration are signal elements of that battle. The logic that drives public-owned enterprises within the colonial, post-independence environment, progressive, at one level, consists in diversifying the dominant ownership of means of production which was private and controlled by the British bourgeoisie, a foreign entity. At a more significant level, these state enterprises functioned within the logic of capitalism which defines colonialism. They represent a far cry from a qualitative change to ownership of the means of production by the producers who, by the same logic, gain access to, and run, the State reconfigured as the antithesis of the colonial/capitalist State, and resting on a reconfigured economic base of society. The Nkrumah aftermath has seen the former colonising entity, owners of major means of production worldwide, mutate, wearing consummate generosity as donors, as development partners.

The present essay argues thus against the proposition, for instance, that 'The influence of Marxism and the *Communist manifesto* is clear enough in *Towards colonial freedom*' (Rooney, 2010, p. 37). Rooney does not indicate how this influence shows. *Towards colonial freedom* carries references to Marx, Engels and Lenin, but they stop as passing references, and do not result in the use, or manifest influence, of the framework Marx created. In the case of Lenin, specific references are made to sections of his *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*. But, as we have shown, Lenin's work gets misread. Our position is also contrary to the claim by the Soviet writer, Smertin, who clearly is not operating from within the Marxist perspective, that Nkrumah 'cites Lenin's definition of imperialism and uses it in his analysis of the prospects for independence' (Smertin, 1990, p. 42).

Three quotes, consistent with the subjectivism of the nationalist frame of reference, are rather given prominence. They precede the actual text of *Towards colonial freedom*, serving as props or at any rate as thinking that lends support to its central thesis. These fit within what technically are known as paratexts. The first is by the Italian nationalist, Giuseppe Mazzini, reflecting on revolution. The same quote appears in the later *Consciencism* (1964) and made to serve the argument of the text:

Every true revolution is a programme, and derived from a new, general principle and organic principle. The first thing necessary is to accept that principle. Its development must then be confined to men who are believers in it, and emancipated from every lie or connected to any principle of an opposite nature. (1964, p. vii)

The Mazzini quote stays wholly at the subjective level. It talks about revolution deriving from a new principle propelling itself against an old principle and requiring 'men', i.e. humans, who believe in it to develop it. What are named as principles are subjective categories, mental images, unrelated to the defining moment of society: the economic base of society typified by the mode of ownership of means of production. The revolution then, as principle, stays as a mental image. The next quote by the German Wilhelm Liebknecht (1962, p. vii) reflects likewise on a principle in the abstract: 'To negotiate with forces that are hostile on matters of principle means to sacrifice principle itself. Principle is indivisible. It is either wholly kept or wholly sacrificed. The slightest concession on matters of principle infers the abandonment of principle.'

The third, by the Ghanaian Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford, is a nationalist call for a United West Africa. The context within which the union being canvassed fits the mode of production, the economic base of the projected United Africa, is not specified:

The future of West Africa demands that the youth of West Africa should start life with a distinct objective. Of brain power we are assured. Of mechanical skill there is no dearth. What is wanted is the directing hand which will point to the right goal. A united West Africa arises, chastened and inspired with a conviction that in union is her strength, her weakness in discord. (1962, p. vii)

Casely-Hayford functioned within the early nationalist National Congress for British West Africa. Missing in *Towards colonial freedom* are key texts by Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky...that would have helped frame a more rigorous scientific study.

There are moments, however, when the discourse steers close to the class perspective, as on page xvii. We find here words that, within a clearly delineated framework of historical materialism, would have led to fitting out the economic base of capitalism/imperialism and possibly relating it to colonialism: 'Therefore these colonies become avenues for capital investments, not for the benefit of the *colonial peoples*, but for the benefit of *the investors* whose *agents are the governments* concerned' (Nkrumah, 1962, p. xvii) (emphasis added). Indeed governments are agents of investors. Governments serve investors. Governments operate state power that serves the people as a whole but primarily the owners of property as means of production; i.e. the ruling class. The investors, operatives of the colonial economic base, are of the bourgeoisie, of the ruling class under capitalism. Their interests get served first. The driving force behind imperialism is determined primarily by the interests of the ruling class. Imperialism is the creation of the bourgeoisie, the ruling class of capitalist society. Lenin mentions that the stage of imperialism is marked by the phenomenon of the export of capital superseding the export of commodities. The export of capital is a major feature of imperialism; it is crucial in the drive to colonise. Of course we meet again the designation 'colonial peoples' occurring as a homogeneous category shorn of class distinctions.

We discern hints at the class perspective earlier on page xv:

the aim of all colonial governments in Africa and elsewhere has been the struggle for raw materials; and not only this, but the colonies have become a dumping ground, and colonial peoples the false recipients of manufactured goods of the industrialists and capitalists of *Great Britain, France, Belgium* and other colonial powers who turn to the dependent territories which feed their industrial plants. (p. xv) [emphasis added].

'Industrialists and capitalists' are of the ruling bourgeois class, but not otherwise specified. Besides, the class phenomenon is further obscured by the use of 'colonial powers' against which the perception pits 'colonial peoples'.

The essential nature of colonialism and imperialism does get buried in the fixation on the subjective, on the image in the mirror. This results from the theoretical inadequacies of *Towards*

colonial freedom. A good grasp of the materialist conception of history is a requirement for teasing out the nature of imperialism and colonialism and the strategy for combating it.

Concluding

It bears re-affirming that the perspective that informs Kwame Nkrumah's *Towards colonial freedom* is nationalist. There is some effort to reach beyond the nationalist perspective. It is evidenced in references to Marx, and some indication of reading from Lenin's *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*. However, all is swamped by the nationalist perspective or outright misreading. The nationalist perspective is wholly misleading, as we have pointed out. It canvasses the subjective as against the objective. It focuses on the superstructure of colonial society making abstraction of its economic base, and of the economic base of the society rid of colonialism (of capitalism in its imperialist phase).

The subjective, the ideal, the idea, is the image in the mirror. The lure of the mirror image, in the absence of a strong hold on the materialist conception of history, gets overwhelming in the text. The mirror image, as Marx points out, stands reality on its head. That is what Hegel's dialectical idealism does. Materialism, joined to dialectics, allows for standing reality right side up. As Marx puts it, with Hegel the dialectic 'is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again' (Marx, 1962, p.456).

At the deeper level, nationalism defends the capitalist status quo of colonialism. At a superficial level, it purports to be combating it. Imperialism turned out to be a lot more discerning and stopped Nkrumah before he led Ghana too far into grasping a perspective, the socialist, that would have provided a solid basis for fighting imperialism. The BBC has had Kwame Nkrumah proclaimed Africa's man of the 20th century. It buttresses other efforts at holding him up for admiration throughout Africa. What this encourages is to freeze, not just him, but political discourse in Africa and generally among the earth's wretched¹, within the nationalist perspective. The reading proposed in here is projected through the science of historical materialism. It is aimed at reaching Kwame Nkrumah beyond the effort he makes to project *Class struggle in Africa* (1970) through a Marxist perspective.

¹ An intertextuality extracted from the first line of the anthem of the International Working Men's Association: ('Debout les damnés de la terre') ('Arise the Wretched of the Earth'). The 'International' was composed by the 19th century French song writer, Eugène Pottier. The title of Frantz Fanon's celebrated essay, *Les damnés de la terre* (*The wretched of the earth*) has the same line as hypotext.

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