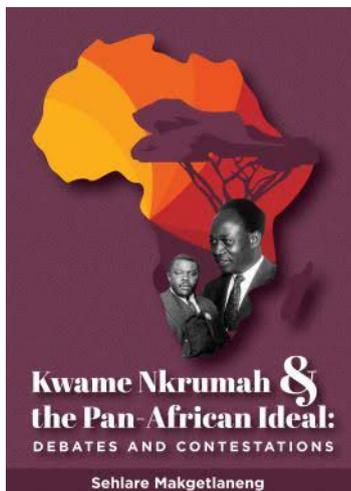


Kwame Nkrumah and the Pan-African Ideal

Debates and Contestation

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In this book of 10 Chapters, the author lays bare inconvenient truths in the general thought, policy, and strategic African environment that has degraded both the lineage and legacy of Pan-Africanism. The inconvenient truths bear no hubris and arrogance by the author but are in essence meant to be at once emancipatory and provocative. As such, the chapters move us beyond facile reductionism and superficial exegesis and help us to confront serious dilemmas whose various interwoven chapter axes and points of reference draw their inspiration from a reflective temperament and enquiring disposition that is often lacking in current forms and modalities of scholarship on similar subjects and themes.

It is important to note in this regard that the critical quest for African unity and integration is often lost in the interplay and interstices of a highly bureaucratized, unimaginative, and linear governance regime.

This explains why current regional and continental institutional, strategic, and policy dynamics are totally devoid of a Pan-African philosophical anchor, even though there are often rhetorical genuflections to honour the founding fathers of Pan-Africanism. Therefore, there is little to suggest that sufficient intellectual attention is devoted to the relevance of an appropriate philosophical *gestalt* that is rooted in the historicity which provided the normative and political vectors for Pan-African thought and practice. As such, across the African landscape, there is a glaring absence of an alternate African-centric epistemology and ontology that can provide a safe and secure mooring from the high seas of chronic instability, conflict, poverty, and underdevelopment.

This book is thus a welcome and salutary corrective to a neglected area of interrogative study and critical enquiry; indeed, its publication comes at an appropriate juncture when Africa's existential landscape is being buffeted by a variety of centrifugal forces, both internally and externally. Compounded by a *de facto* dysfunctional interstate system and carrying all the patrimonial pathologies of the post-colonial state, Africa seems ill prepared to deal with the continental and global intersections of the viral storm unleashed by the Covid-19 pandemic, rising military tensions and religious extremism, external trade and aid dependence, disruptive trade and commercial relations, environmental degradation, increasing poverty, atavistic forms of ethnicity and nationalism, as well as conflict and political instability.

How the Horsemen of the Apocalypse can be kept at bay is another question, but this book is a timely invitation to reconsider and rethink the current obstacles and hurdles to African unity and integration based on the progressive and pathbreaking insights of Kwame Nkrumah, the widely recognised architect and doyen of Pan-African thought and practice. In Chapter 1, the author brings into stark

relief the tendentious and highly partisan attempts to discredit and distort Nkrumah's thinking about the norms, values, and practices that ought to underpin Pan-African unity and integration. The author's analytical tour and cogent critique are useful antidotes to setting the record straight. In this vein, he demonstrates that conceptually and philosophically, Nkrumah insisted that Pan-Africanism is very much a political project in a rhythmic logic from which all else will and must flow. From this simple yet elegant premise there originate the important and enduring derivatives of self-reliance, self-rule, autonomous agency, a functional and accountable state system, a transcendent African identity, and a secure and prosperous Africa.

This Nkrumahist foundation developed in Chapter 1 is critical for the architecture and organisation of the rest of the book and its *leitmotif* of highlighting the nature of debates, the war of intellectual and academic positions, and the shifting nature of the Pan-African discursive canon, in both its historical and contemporary manifestations. The *leitmotif* is further motivated and informed by careful and meticulous scholarship and research that teases out in dialectical fashion the political struggles, ideological antagonisms, and instrumental interests among the major protagonists in Africa and internationally.

Against this backdrop, there is a unity between Chapters 2 to 5 in terms of the interpretive compass which navigates major philosophical and indeed, ontological issues regarding how to understand the nature of continental integration and how this could be driven by the binaries of political and economic factors; and which set of factors then enjoy primacy in the Nkrumahist configuration? This opens the analytical door for the author to revisit debates about how Africa could be united in the context of a borderless continent, either as a United States of Africa or an African Union Government. The desultory progress and the stultifying ambivalence of Africa's political leaders towards these notions leads the author to a serious critique of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a failed blueprint for continental integration so much so that it has been reduced to an administrative arm of the African Union.

In Chapters 6 and 7 respectively, we encounter the intellectual influence and pedigree of Mbita Chitala and Claude Ake for their formative contributions to the Pan-African ideal and canon. In the case of the Zambian Chitala, it was all about keeping Pan-Africanism alive by pointedly showing how it was being undermined by morally reprobate and politically compromised African heads of state. There is a nice synergy between how the author explains Chitala's ideas and his sensitive treatment in Chapter 7 of the Nigerian Claude Ake's deep ruminations and concerns about the state of democracy and development in Africa. Ake's major work on the subject was written in the 1990s, but as the chapter cogently demonstrates, the struggles and challenges which he highlighted at that time continue to constrain the twin stimuli that democracy and development can provide for African unity and integration.

In Chapter 8, the author wrestles with the question of NATO intervention in Libya and the duplicitous role played by the US and France in the demise of the Gaddafi regime. At first blush, this chapter seems to sit uncomfortably with the rest, but on further reflection it raises salient and first-order questions about imperial overstretch and neo-colonial manipulation which has historically contaminated the Pan-African ideal, often with the collaboration and connivance of Africa's political leadership. Based on the ambiguities of sovereignty and how, in Libya's case, this was violated with impunity and with disastrous consequences, Chapter 9 raises dilemmas about the national question and how articulations of nationalism, leadership, and identity reverberate in Africa's strategic integration environment, with specific reference to case studies of the DRC and Angola.

Finally, this book cannot be taken lightly. It is demanding to read because of the breadth, depth, and scale of its scholarship. Because of this, there will be readers who will find much to applaud

in the book's pages; but equally, there will be those who will find that there is much to argue with. However, that is the intrinsic value of the book because its primary intention is to be an incubator of debate and contestation of an enduring historical and contemporary subject which has different intellectual lineages, ideological proclivities, and interpretive traditions. Whichever side the reader may fall, ultimately this book should be considered as both a backward- and forward-looking teleological journey as will be discovered in the final Chapter 10 where the ends, goals, and purpose of Nkrumah's original vision of Pan-Africanism bring conclusions and recommendations together.

This book has obviously had a long gestation period and should be welcomed as an important contribution to a stagnating subject. Indeed, on the first page of the Introduction, author states the book's objective as follows: "This work attempts to be an excellent piece of academic work". In this reviewer's opinion, it certainly succeeds in that quest.

Book information

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