IN SEARCH OF DURABLE SECURITY FOR AFRICA:
AFRICAN LIBERATION AND THE PAN-AFRICANIST IDEALS OF
JOMO KENYATTA (KENYA),
KWAME NKRUMAH (GHANA),
AND JULIUS K. NYERERE
(TANZANIA)¹

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INTRODUCTION

Ghana’s Nkrumah, for example, urged his people to seek the political kingdom first and all other things would be added to it: ‘once the political independence has been achieved, the country’s full potentialities can, and must, be explored’. Sadly, African nationalist leaders realized that it could be too late to attain the promised economic kingdom. Therefore, Nkrumah insisted that ‘something in the nature of economic revolution is required’.²

This study, done with Africa’s durable security in mind, is in the context of Pan-Africanism within African mass struggles as well as liberation, self-empowerment and the future leadership of the continent. Utilizing the
pre-independent liberating strategies of Kenya’s late President Jomo Kenyatta, Ghana’s late President Kwame Nkrumah, and Tanzania’s ex-President Julius K. Nyerere, Pan-Africanism is seen as part of the liberating tools of Africans on the continent and of Blacks in the diaspora. For very clear underpinnings and articulation of what Kenyatta, Nkrumah and Nyerere deemed to be the “true” Pan-Africanist movement, this study relies heavily on the movements’ definitions espoused by the three leaders as well as by George Padmore, Professors Ronald Walters and P. O. Esedebe.

In Nkrumah’s search for African liberation and the subsequent continental unity, he urged (as quoted above) his fellow Africans to “seek the political kingdom first and all other things would be added to it”. Kenyatta and Nyerere, operating from the East African theatre of African politics, saw the need for economic freedom and continental unity within the context of Pan-Africanism. Yet, they wanted to see their realization or achievement through gradual approaches. Hence, at the 1964 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Annual Meeting in Cairo, Egypt, Nkrumah—supported by some radical African leaders—and Nyerere showed transparent public disagreement, as briefly explained here:

It was, indeed, on the issues dealing with African unity that Nkrumah and Nyerere shared fundamental differences. For example, at the July 1964 OAU annual meeting in Cairo, Egypt, Nkrumah, then President Sekou Toure of Guinea, Malian President Modibo Keita, and other known radical African leaders advocated a quick pace toward continental unity. Then, Tanzanian President Nyerere, however, urged his colleagues to pursue continental unity at a slower pace...

While Nkrumah wondered if his fellow African leaders wanted the OAU to be an association like the United Nations, “whose decisions were sometimes ignored by its own members, adding, ‘is it the type of association we want for ourselves in the United Africa [that] we speak of with such feeling and emotion?’”. Nyerere countered, “To rule out step-by-step progress in a march to unity is to rule out unity itself”. Most certainly, these early nationalist leaders of Africa’s decolonization struggle meant well, although they saw differences in the approaches toward the realization of Africa’s mass struggles for self-empowerment, liberation and future global leadership.

Consequently, utilizing the definitions of Pan-Africanism (which are integrated in the study and, which are also espoused by these leaders as well as by Padmore, Esedebe and Walters) this study amply underscores the enshrining of Africa’s security as well as the Pan-Africanist ideals and goals of Kenyatta, Nkrumah, and Nyerere, within the context of Africa’s liberation strategies, their successes and failures.
KENYATTA, NKRUMAH AND NYERERE AS PIONEERS

The pioneers of modern African independence (or liberation) attached a great deal of importance to the struggles that they led for the decolonization processes of their respective nations. Former Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, for example, linked the independence of Ghana to the total liberation of Africa as a continent when, at Ghana’s independence, on March 6, 1957, he underscored, *inter alia*: “The Independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African Continent”.7 In fact, three years after Ghana’s independence, Nkrumah had not toned down his rhetorical assertions in support of African liberation. In a speech at Ghana’s Parliament on December 16, 1959, he asserted: “Africa is marching forward to freedom and no power on earth can halt her now”.8

In addition to the foregoing verbal support, Nkrumah also lent Ghana’s material, moral and spiritual support to the various liberation movements, most of which had their headquarters based in Ghana. Tanzania’s ex-President Julius Nyerere, too, offered a lot of support to several of the liberation movements, many of which had offices in Tanzania. Kenya’s late President Jomo Kenyatta, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, Nkrumah and others were among the leading coordinators of the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester, Great Britain. Also, since then, they actively supported African liberation activities publicly. However, the Kenyan leader, unlike Nkrumah and Nyerere, did not go out openly to wage a revolutionary banner in support of Africa’s various liberation movements either on Kenyan soil or with Kenyan resources.9 Even his support for the Kenya-based Mau-Mau movement was so negligible and so much in doubt that his April 8, 1953 conviction by a pro-British criminal court in Kenya, which sentenced him to a seven-year jail term, was questioned by real leaders of the anti-British Mau-Mau movement. Many Kenyan nationalist leaders, including the late Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya and others spoke out openly against the imprisonment of Kenyatta as well because, at the time, he was neither a card-carrying member or a very active supporter of the Mau-Mau movement.10 In fact, Kenya’s major political party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU) refused “to form a government despite its electoral victory until Kenyatta was released [from detention].11

However, the three nationalist leaders—Kenyatta, Nkrumah and Nyerere—sincerely wanted to see the continent of Africa liberated from colonial rule in order for the continent’s leaders to end what the Ghanaian leader saw as balkanisation, about which he wrote the following:

Africa is clearly fragmented into too many small, uneconomic and non-viable States, many of whom are having a very hard struggle to survive...so long as we remain balkanised, regionally or territorially, we shall be at the mercy of colonialism and imperialism.12
In fact, the desire of the three leaders to see continental unity echoed in their respective national governance and leadership. Believing in the adage that charity begins at home, all the three post-colonial political leaders made sure that their own countries enjoyed unity before talking about continental unity. In Kenya, for example, the opposition Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) (just like the opposition elements in Ghana and Tanzania) was very much interested in a confederacy, whereby regional autonomy would be guaranteed. However, Kenyatta’s KANU government “quickly moved to centralize the state apparatus: regionalism was abolished in 1964; a republican constitution was promulgated, followed by the abolition of the senate two years later. The new ruling class gradually consolidated immense power in the hands of the [Kenyan] executive...”

In pre-independent Ghana (then called the Gold Coast), the opposition National Liberation Movement (NLM) and its leaders, led by then Dr. K.A. Busia and Dr. J. B. Danquah, the distinguished jurist, wanted a form of federation in a country of less than ten million people. To subvert this divisive and sectional political desire, Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party (CPP) government sought constitutional advice from the British government, for which Sir Federick Bourne, with a lot of constitutional expertise in India and Pakistan, was sent to the then Gold Coast on September 26, 1954. Nkrumah wrote about Sir Frederick’s work in the following words:

The Constitutional Adviser completed his work and reported to the Governor on 17th December. In this Report he recommended the devolution of certain powers and functions to Regional Assemblies which would be empowered to plan their own developments and to apply for grants-in-aid from the Government...The regional assemblies would have no power to levy taxation and on all constitutional and traditional matters which concerned a particular Region, the traditional Council and appropriate Regional Assembly would be consulted.

All of the foregoing maneuvering, on Nkrumah’s part, was to ensure that his country would remain a united entity as it awaited independence from the British. As he protested to the British authorities, Nkrumah felt that his NLM opponents wanted to undermine stability and democracy by asking for a federal form of governance, adding: “I should like to emphasize, that nothing must be done to weaken the cause of democracy by reducing the status of our freely-elected Legislative Assembly through giving greater weight to the words of a minority as opposed to the decisions of the Assembly...” In the end, Ghana achieved its independence and remained a united nation.
For Tanzania, in 1964, matters reached a heated political hiatus when Dr. Nyerere, as the prime minister, realized that if unity were not achieved for the nation and its neighbours, there could be no progress after independence. In fact, in that year, a coup d'état had ended the reign of the Sultanate in Zanzibar. Then, on mainland Tanganyika—ruled by Nyerere—there had been a mutiny in a section of the army on January 20, 1964, which had to be put down by force with the help of Brigadier Patrick S. Douglas, the British Commander of the Tanganyika Rifles Company. Speedily, Nyerere, in search of lasting peace through unity, announced on April 23, that year, that “the leaders of Tanganyika and Zanzibar had signed articles for the union of the nation of the nations. The new nation was named Tanzania, with Nyerere as its first president, and [Sheik] Karume as his deputy.”

Although there was successful mobilization of the African masses for the liberation of the continent, the crucial fact was the respective approaches or tactics of these three leaders, particularly Nkrumah and Nyerere, both of whom were operating within the context of socialism. That was why, at the 1964 OAU annual meeting in Cairo, Nkrumah and Nyerere had a hectic confrontation when African unity was discussed since—as stated briefly above—they exhibited fundamental differences. As the radical African leaders, Nkrumah, Guinean late President Sekou Toure, Malian late President Modibo Keita and others, wanted to see African unity advance quickly, while Nyerere and other moderate African leaders wanted it to be done at a slower pace, adding that without a step-by-step approach to it, African unity seemed to be doomed.

In spite of the differences in approach or style in the efforts of African leaders to promote African unity, it is an undeniable fact that Kenyatta, Nkrumah and Nyerere never lost their interests in pan-Africanism. In fact, it was within the context of Pan-Africanism that Nkrumah made his 1957 pronouncement, which called for his country’s independence to become a springboard for the total decolonization of the continent. Most certainly, it is believed that Nkrumah’s tough stance on the decolonization of Africa might have prompted the then British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, in speaking to the South African Parliament in February 1960, to state unequivocally that “the wind of change is blowing through this Continent.” Subsequently, after attaining independence, many countries of Africa were yelling for so much political autonomy that they quickly opted for a republican status: Ghana had attained that status in 1960, but Kenya did it in 1964, while Tanzania and several other nations followed that route.
The post-independent African leaders were correct in their desire to correct centuries of wrongs. In fact, a heated discussion with Stuart Cloete, a white South African writer, Zimbabwean nationalist leader, Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole, was on target when he denied Cloete's claim: "Let us have no illusions, the black man hates the white. Above all be hates him for being white, because this is something he can never be."²⁰ Sithole, who played a very active role in Zimbabwean independence struggles, replied that nothing could be further from the truth, adding:

On a purely human basis the African accepts the white man. In the majority of cases it is the white man who does not accept the African. One of the reasons why the white man fears granting the African full independence is that the African may use [it] against the white man the hateful methods he has seen the white man use against the African. What the African hates in the white man is his unfair social, economic, political, and educational discriminatory practices which relegate the African to second- or third-rate citizenship in the land of his birth...²¹

Indeed, the political kingdom, as Nkrumah espoused, was achieved by many nations of Africa but, without economic independence, most of these nations became like birds in gilded cages: they had wings but they could not fly. For, in the heat of the struggles for independence, "African nationalists... did not seem to take the economic emancipation of their people very seriously."²² Sadly, the economic plight of the decolonized nations of Africa and their people were very similar in their desire to the circumstances of Blacks in Africa, especially as "Black leaders in Africa and America fought relentlessly for political inclusion but without economic power. Therefore, their people have continued to be at the mercy of forces that they considered to be their oppressors: the European colonialists and white America."²³

Winning political freedom without economic salvation in many African countries placed Nkrumah and many of his post-colonial indigenous leaders in very precarious situations. Professor Ronald Walters aptly summed it up in discussing Nyerere and Nkrumah within the purview of African-America's Pan-Africanist interests. He noted that one of the persistent influences from Africa was the then Tanzanian President Nyerere, "who, during the decade of the 1960s, maintained his Pan-Africanist principles as head of the government of Tanzania, long after Nkrumah had passed from the scene in Ghana and after the Pan-African Movement of East and central Africa had failed."²⁴ He added that to African-American Pan-Africanists, Nyerere "was a beacon of light in Africa, and when his government in 1967 released a Declaration on Self-Reliance Arusha (known as the 'Arusha Declaration') and its companion statement on education, Education for Self-Reliance, the effect was instant and pervasive."²⁵
With socialist inclinations like Nkrumah, Dr. Nyerere’s document, as explained by Professor Walters, “set out essentially a socialist direction that would govern those active in the party and especially those who would assume positions of leadership in the government of Tanzania.” After Nyerere retired gracefully from Tanzania’s leadership on July 31, 1995, his critics claimed that he failed in his socialist experiment, a contention that he has honestly and painfully accepted. While Kenyatta abandoned the little socialist interests that he seemed to have acquired from his relationship with George Padmore, the West Indian apostle and propagator of Pan-Africanism, Nkrumah, on the other hand, was like Nyerere. However, he did mean well in thinking that he could evenly share Ghana’s national cake and natural resources through socialism. Therefore, the Ghanaian leader minced no words when, in his published 1957 memoirs, Nkrumah wrote: “Today, I am a non-denominational Christian and a Marxist socialist and I have not found any contradiction between the two.”

In all instances, critics are quick to point out that ideologically and economically, Nkrumah and Nyerere failed. Yet, within the context of self-empowerment of Africa’s future leadership, both leaders—like Kenyatta, with his minimal economic successes—paved the way for current leaders to continue from where they left off. In describing Nkrumah’s experiment in Ghana as a myth in his book, A Myth Is Broken (1968), retired Major-General A.K. Ocran, one of Ghana’s 1966 coup d’etat leaders, offered some reasons that prompted his fellow soldiers to step into politics in Africa generally. He wrote, “Another pattern has been unfolding in contemporary Africa: as state [or country] after State has tottered and floundered, it has been the military which has stepped in, when all else seemed to have failed, to save these states [nations] from utter destruction.” To many observers, these characterizations are not fair to the genuinely progressive and patriotic leadership that Nkrumah and many other deposed leaders gave from the time of independence to the years of their overthrow.

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, one can conclude impartially that Kenyatta, Nkrumah and Nyerere succeeded in empowering their people in a variety of ways and, in doing so, helped to lay the foundation for part of Africa’s durable security for the future. Also, their policies, initially, promoted economic development, national growth and security, as they felt that through unity, Africa would be stronger. For example, in Tanzania, between 1961 and 1964, there were only 17 African medical doctors serving the entire Tanzanian (earlier called Tanganyika) nation. Through Nyerere’s 1964-1969 five-year development plan, by 1980, there were 598 of such doctors serving only Tanzania’s urban areas and 547 serving rural areas of the country. It was a similar situation
with the shortage of nurses, teachers and other professionals at Tanzanian independence. In Kenya and Ghana, similar growths were experienced, hence it is not fair to conclude that the seeming difficulties that Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania, (particularly the last two nations), experienced should be lumped into a measure of failure on the part of these nations' first elected indigenous leaders. In fact, the latter had little or nothing to serve as existing yardsticks to measure their actions.

The desire of Kenyatta, Nkrumah and Nyerere to see a strong and secure Africa prompted them to collaborate in establishing the Organization of African Unity (OAU). To them, it is up to the future generation to continue their pioneering work, if Africa, as a continent, is to see prosperity and security in spite of the fact that the three leaders are now deceased.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1 A Revised Version of a Research Paper Presented by A. B. Assensoh, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Afro-American Studies, Indiana University-Bloomington, USA at the 16th Annual Pan-African Studies Conference of Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana, April 9-10, 1999.


4 Assensoh 1998:3.

5 Assensoh 1998:3.


8 Nkrumah 1967:1.

9 Assensoh 1998:34.


12 Nkrumah 1965; 1964.


15 Nkrumah 1957:243-244.

16 Nkrumah 1957:245.


20 Basil Davidson 1967:54.

21 Davidson 1967:55.


24 Walters 1997:64.

25 Walters, ibid. 64-65.

26 Walters, ibid. 65.

27 Nkrumah 1957: 2.

28 Ocran 1968:4-5.