



Variations in Postcolonial Imagination: Reflection on Senghor, Nyerere and Nkrumah¹

Jimi O. Adesina*

Abstract

This article aims to strengthen contemporary efforts to construct and pursue a pan-African agenda by interrogating the postcolonial imaginings of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah. To counter the present-day tendency to erase and flatten the diversity of this period, the article explores the variations and similarities of the three leaders' approaches to socialism, pan-African unity, nationhood, economic development, epistemology and democracy. Through this contrast, the article derives some broad lessons for the contemporary period, including the importance of cultivating domestic resources (human, material and financial) rather than being dependent on external forces; the need for countries to construct a macro-vision that coordinates their economic, social and political projects; and the importance of maintaining sovereignty of thought in policy thinking on the continent to effectively break free from the universal, market-based prescriptions that now dominate under neoliberalism.

Résumé

Cet article vise à renforcer les efforts actuels pour construire et poursuivre un agenda panafricain en interrogeant les imaginaires postcoloniaux de Léopold Sédar Senghor, Julius Nyerere et Kwame Nkrumah. Pour contrer la tendance actuelle à effacer et à aplanir la diversité de cette période, l'article examine les variations et les similitudes dans les approches de ces trois leaders en matière de socialisme, d'unité panafricaine, de nation, de développement économique, d'épistémologie et de démocratie. À travers ce contraste, l'article tire quelques grandes leçons pour la période contemporaine, notamment l'importance d'exploiter les ressources domestiques (humaines, matérielles et financières) plutôt que d'être dépendant de forces extérieures ; la nécessité pour les pays de construire une macro-vision qui coordonne leurs projets économiques,

* Professor and the DSI/NRF Chair of Social Policy, University of South Africa / Post-Colonialisms Today researcher. Email: jotadesina@gmail.com

sociaux et politiques ; et, l'importance de la souveraineté de la pensée dans la réflexion politique sur le continent pour se libérer efficacement des prescriptions universelles basées sur le marché et qui dominent aujourd'hui sous l'ère du néolibéralisme.

Introduction

A prevailing take on the predicament that most African countries face is a turgid pessimism about the *postcolonial*¹ situation, with responses ranging from atavism to self-negation, from the street-level to academia. It is a take on the postcolonial conditions that has produced in a contemporary variant the borrowing, lock, stock and barrel, of the Latin American discourse of coloniality/decoloniality. Decolonisation, we are told, is an illusion, and colonialism remains vibrant and unchanged, manifesting in many forms of 'coloniality' – from coloniality of being to coloniality of power (Maldonado Torres 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a; 2013b). Decolonisation, in this view, is an impossibility, and the idea of postcolonialism an illusion.

However, decoloniality is not decolonisation. Despite claiming affinity with, and progeny of Anibal Quijano, the decoloniality discourse has drifted from Quijano (1971; 2000; 2007). The North American variant of 'coloniality/decoloniality' is more a variation on European 'critical theory'. While the acclaimed 'locus of enunciation' (Mignolo 2007) of coloniality discourse is Latin America, it is actually in the context of North America – and the status anxiety and ambiguity it creates in Latino/a scholars in North American academia – that we locate its locus of enunciation. The 'coloniality of being' (Maldonado Torres 2007) that underpins coloniality discourse, grounded as it is in Martin Heidegger's ontology, overstates the psycho-cultural effects of colonialism and fails to account for the endogenous modes of being and norms of sociality that underpinned resistance against colonialism. In and of itself, the totalising notion of 'coloniality of being' is unable to account for the resistance against colonialism, much less in the context of slavery. Remarkably, the 'decolonial' intellectual is able to escape the totalising impact of coloniality, to challenge coloniality and construct a 'decolonial epistemology' (Grosfoguel 2007). Yet, this escape is somehow impossible for everyday modes of sociality and the political project of decolonisation. 'Coloniality of being' overstates its case at the expense of its heuristic viability.

Decolonisation is fundamentally a project of sovereignty. The 'sovereign project' (à la Samir Amin) is one which we – intellectuals, civil society operatives, ordinary citizens, committed public servants and politicians, etc. – strive for. Often, we do not reach the target we set for ourselves. Sometimes we exceed some and fall short of others. But it is in the optimism

of pushing against the seemingly impossible, and the awareness that the world awaits those with the determination and capacity to shape it, that we set targets – personal, group, community, national – about what the nature of our tomorrow must be. A discourse of impossibility (especially political with a capital ‘P’) disempowers, *ab initio*. It vitiates the agency of peoples of (the former) colonial territories – for better or worse – in seeking their sovereign paths in the aftermath of formal colonial rule.

The claim of coloniality is pursued with splendid disregard for what anti-colonial/anti-imperialist activists and intellectuals have written and said about the nature of imperialism and neo-colonialism without suggesting that both conditions are the same (Nkrumah 1965; Nyerere 1962a; 1976; 1978). Indeed, it is the question of agency (without disregarding the enormity of the challenges of imperialism and neo-colonialism) that is at the heart of Kwame Nkrumah’s injunction to ‘seek ye *first* the political kingdom’ (1957: 164). Something he specifically stated was a precondition for other dimensions of the ‘kingdom’ – economic, social, knowledge – rather than an end in itself. As Mkandawire (2001: 5) notes:

In the post-World War II international regimes, underpinned by the Bretton Woods agreement, the nation-state could pursue a wide range of policies relatively autonomously. World trade increased while individual countries pursued their own national goals on employment and economic growth.

The discourse of coloniality erases the available space, *however constrained*, for the human agency of postcolonial subjects. Inspired by the dependency school, coloniality discourse shares the *dependentista’s* deep pessimism about the feasibility of the ‘colonial subjects’ charting alternative paths to national reconstruction, distinct from that of formal colonial domination, or the feasibility of ‘development’. Yet, even in countries that are seemingly trapped in the ‘colonial matrix of power’, formal independence was inspired by – and offered the space for – efforts to enact sovereign national projects. In a sense, ‘pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’ became the pessimism of the intellect *and* the will.

Beyond agency is the importance of recognising the varieties of postcolonial imaginations of anti-colonial campaigners and activists. This is against the flattening of the African political imagination as unyielding subordination to coloniality. In this context, reflection on the thoughts of three of Africa’s most prominent intellectual-political leaders is useful. In doing so, I focus on the thoughts and statecraft of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah, who occupied different locations on the African broad left, and were self-referentially ‘socialist’. The reflection is organised into seven parts: visions of the postcolonial state and society, pan-African imaginations,

modalities of meeting the development challenges, the postcolonial 'nation-building' project, epistemic bases of postcolonial imaginations, conceptions of gender and democracy, and lessons for contemporary pan-African projects.

Variations in Postcolonial Imagination

The postcolonial imagination that we associate with Senghor, Nyerere and Nkrumah can be explored through a number of frames. Their visions of the postcolonial state can be understood in terms of ideational framing, the constitution of the state, and relations to its external environment. Related to this is the variation in their pan-African vision. Given the centrality of negating the adverse socio-economic legacies of colonialism, it is also important to explore their development visions. Finally, we explore their nation-building projects.

Visions of African Socialism

However differently articulated, Senghor, Nyerere and Nkrumah shared a common claim to 'socialism' as the constitutive premise for the postcolonial society and state they envisioned (Senghor 1964; Nyerere 1962b; 1967b; 1968; 1969; 1973; Nkrumah 1964; 1973). Senghor's idea of African socialism has its grounding in *négritude* and French socialist tradition in the spirit of Henri de Saint-Simon. The specificity of the African, which differentiates her from the European, and the divergence in material conditions, necessitate an African qualification of socialism, drawing more on the effervescence of sensuality and motions as definitive of the African (Senghor 1964: 71–4), rather than on a specific account of African modes of sociation. The old assertion, 'reason is to the Hellenic as emotion is to the African', is replaced with a contrasting of the African as 'a field of pure sensation' whose 'reasoning of the touch' is in contrast to the European's 'reasoning eye' (Senghor 1964: 73). Both in existential terms and modalities of enunciation, Senghorian *négritude* is legible within the context of French colonialism and its Republican values. Senghor (1998: 438) explains the originating existential elements of *négritude* as follows:

We have been taught, by our French masters at the Lycée, that we had no civilisation, having been left off the list of guests at the Banquet of the Universal. We were tabula rasa, or, better still, a lump of soft which the fingers of the white demiurge would mould into shape. The only hope of salvation you could hold out to us was to let ourselves be assimilated.

To understand the eviscerating effect of this condition, Senghor invited his audience² to imagine putting 'on a black skin for five minutes. I know you

find this hard to do but there is no other way to get the living feel of our situation' (*ibid.*: 439).

For Senghor, however, the civilisational erasure is tempered by the 'French master' inviting the 'negro' to sit at the table, saying that even if 'at the bottom of the table ... What matters is that we were invited, and we did come' (*ibid.*). Senghor would attribute to the French for him and others 'to seek the essence of Negritude, and who then showed us where it lay' (*ibid.*). The former in the enforced policy of assimilation and the despair it created in the mind of the object of assimilation. While they can 'assimilate' the French language and mathematics, they could not 'strip off [their] black skins nor root out [their] black souls' (*ibid.*). Against the official line on the denial of the contributions of 'negro' civilisation, Senghor argues that it was the works of several 'freelance [French] thinkers – writers, artists, ethnologists, and pre-historians' (*ibid.*) that pointed him and others to the 'negroid civilisations' ravaged by centuries of slavery and colonialism. 'That negroid civilisation had flourished in the Upper Palaeolithic Age, and that the Neolithic Revolution could not be explained without them' (*ibid.*). Embedded in this emerging discourse would be a central point in Senghorian Negritude – the contrast of Hellenic 'reason which only sees' to the 'negroid' 'intuitive reason, *the reason which comes to grips*' (*ibid.*). This would flower in Senghor's hand into a distinction in fundamentally different modes of reasoning and actuation between the European and the African. This, he would indicate, following Sartre in *Orphée Noir*, was 'an anti-racial racialism' (*ibid.*: 438).

However, Senghor would suggest that this variant of *négritude* (henceforth Negritude) was driven by the passion of youth; it was uncompromising in its rejection of European ontology and epistemological reasoning. A shift away from this initial variant of Negritude came from the lessons, Senghor claims, they learnt from anthropologists: there is no pure race. From here, Negritude came to embody a 'black' civilisational contribution to universal values: 'the Civilisation of the Universal' (*ibid.*: 440). 'Negro-Africans' and Europeans, Senghor argues, 'have a common interest in fostering our specifically native values, whilst remaining open to the values of the *others*' (*ibid.*). Hybridity is a defining element of second wave Senghorian Negritude. The 'essential [human] idiosyncrasy', he argues in his 1961 lecture at Oxford University, 'is the tendency for all peoples, nations, and races to merge' (*ibid.*: 446). The essence of Senghor's Civilisation of the Universal is that it is not a European civilisation imposed by colonial force, but 'a *sybiosis* of the different civilisations' (Senghor *ibid.*: 447).

It is in this context that Senghor would define Negritude – or, at least, his take on Negritude – as:

The whole complex of civilised values – cultural, economic, social, and political – which characterise the black peoples, or more precisely, the Negro-African world. All these values are essentially informed by intuitive reason. Because this sentient reason, the reason which comes to grips, expresses itself emotionally, through that self-surrender, that coalescence of subject and object; through myths, by which I mean the archetypal images of the Collective Soul; above all, through primordial communion, the gift of myth-making, the gift of rhythm, such are the essential elements of Negritude, which you will find indelibly stamped on all the works and activities of the black man (*ibid.*: 440).

A key to understanding Senghor is to read him as a person of his primary vocation: a poet. His poetic vocation explains his predilection for the effervescent language of the communion of souls, the spiritual rhythm, the primacy of emotion, and reasoning as feeling and being in communion with nature. The ‘corrective’ to ‘scientific socialism’, which defines Senghor’s idea of African socialism, is in imprinting norms of mutuality with the spiritual. It is how Senghor reconciles ‘the imperative of modernity – social and economic development in Western terms –with an African ethos’ (Irele 2003: 157). The African cultural norms to which he appeals are largely in the abstract, and, at the initial phase of Negritude, defined in opposition to Cartesian *cogito*. It is on this, as Irele (*ibid.*: 136) argues, that Senghor erects ‘the epistemological foundation of the African world-view and connective ethos.’ But the diverse strands that Senghor weaves together often derive from his readings of a variety of Western intellectuals. As Irele (*ibid.*: 137) notes, Senghor’s Negritude is ‘an African variation of Bergsonism: a verification in African form of the cultural expression of the idea of intuition as the sign of experience at the most profound level of consciousness.’ We will return to this later when we consider the epistemological issues in the contribution of Senghor and others.

If Senghor’s African socialism is derived from his take on Negritude and his wrestling with French intellectual tradition, Nyerere’s take on African socialism is derived more concretely from the norms of solidarity, generosity and care that mark everyday modes of sociality in the context of his birth (Nyerere 1962b; 1968). In a pamphlet of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), published in April 1962, Nyerere set out the historical and normative underpinning of African socialism (Nyerere 1962b). A premise of his discourse on socialism is that it is a ‘state of mind’ concerning how one relates to other humans and the community in general. A millionaire can be a socialist and a peasant may not be – although he is quick to argue that ‘a socialist millionaire is a rare phenomenon’ (Nyerere 1968: 1). He references the norms that defined his upbringing, in what he referred to as ‘an African

tribal society', in defining the 'traditional African society' on which he erects his thoughts on African socialism. It was a society shaped by four interlocking norms: mutuality, generosity, work and collective ownership of the primary means of production – land. The premise of this society is that all who can work must work and contribute to the common wealth. Linked to this is the idea that land, the primary means of production, is (and should be) readily and freely available to all for cultivation on a usufruct basis. The exploitation of one by another – which Nyerere associates with capitalism – is abhorred by such normative framing of sociality. It is within this context that the norms of mutuality and generosity gird social relations. As Nyerere notes:

For when a society is so organised that it cares about its individuals, then, provided he is willing to work, no individual within that society should worry about what will happen to him tomorrow if he does not hoard wealth today. Society itself should look after him, or his widows, or orphans. This is exactly what traditional African society succeeded in doing. Both the 'rich' and the 'poor' individual were completely secure in African society (*ibid.*: 3).

When Nyerere (1962b; 1968) speaks of socialism as 'essentially distributive', it is regarding the redistribution of the outputs of production. The basis of the 'great socialistic achievement [in which everyone has a sense of security, and the universal hospitality on which they could rely] was this ... that every member of society ... contributed his [/her] fair share of efforts towards the production of its wealth' (1968: 5). It is a normative undergirding of generosity and mutual support that abhors 'idlers'. Nyerere drew on a Swahili proverb to make the point: *Mgeni siku mbili; siku ya tutu mpe jembe!* which translates as: 'Treat your guest as a guest for two days; on the third day give him a hoe!' He argued that given the shared social norms, the guest would not wait to be given the hoe, he or she would ask for it.

The new Tanganyika/Tanzania needed to be built fully cognisant of the need to sustain these norms of social constitution and sociality. It means, he argued, restoring the collective, rather than the private ownership of land; battling against the 'hoarding of wealth', which leads to the exploitation of one another; ensuring that everyone with the capacity is gainfully employed; and equitable distribution of the proceeds of economic growth. 'In our traditional African society', Nyerere (1968: 7) argues, 'we were individuals within a community ... We took care of the community, and the community took care of us.' The values of the new society that Nyerere (*ibid.*: 50) was concerned with creating is defined by the three principles of 'equality and respect for human dignity, sharing of the resources which are produced by our efforts, work by everyone and exploitation by none.'

If Senghor's rejection of 'scientific socialism' is on the grounds of its neglect of the cultural and the spiritual, for Nyerere (*ibid.*: 11–12), it was 'the doctrinaire European socialists' deification of class conflict that he found most 'intolerable'. While understood as the outcome of the agrarian and industrial revolutions, out of which European socialism emerged, it nonetheless characterised 'civil war' not as something unfortunate, 'but as something good and necessary'. Nyerere argues that African socialism, on the other hand, has no misfortune of such burden. 'The true African socialist does not look on one class of men [and women] as his [or her] brethren [or sisters] and another as his [or her] natural enemies' (*ibid.*: 11). While founded in the extended family, the norms of conviviality extend outwards to the nation, the continent and humanity. African socialism becomes the grounding for pan-Africanism:

For no true African socialist can look at a line drawn on a map and say, 'The people on this side of that line are my brothers, but those who happen to live on the other side of it can have no claim on me'; *every individual on this continent is his brother* [or sister] (Nyerere 1968: 12).

While affirming that socialism in the African context is anchored in 'the restoration of Africa's humanist and egalitarian principles of society' (Nkrumah 1973: 439), as early as 1964 (in *Consciencism*), Nkrumah signalled his disaffection with the term 'African Socialism' (Nkrumah 1964: 105). He distinguished between two broad types of African purveyors of socialism: those concerned with reconciling human values of egalitarianism and solidarity with modern technology, and those for whom African socialism is 'more closely associated with anthropology than with political economy' (1973: 440). The stylised pre-colonial Africa that was classless (with no rich and poor), Nkrumah contends, 'is a facile simplification' for which 'there is no historical or even anthropological evidence' (*ibid.*: 440). Even so, Nkrumah shares a lot with Nyerere in their conception of the motive force of their ideas of socialism. Both are grounded, materially, in norms of mutuality that they see as definitive of most pre-colonial African societies. In its contemporary form, the objective is to ground the new societies they seek to build in 'the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society' (Nkrumah 1964: 79).

When Nkrumah, or more specifically the Convention People's Party (CPP), refers to African socialism, it is in the context of what they considered as adapting 'scientific socialism' to the 'Ghanaian condition' (Biney 2011: 87), similar to George Padmore's use of 'Pan-African socialism' (James 2015: 172). From 1964 onwards, and particularly in his writings between his overthrow and death, Nkrumah's take on socialism and revolution moved

more within the framework of Marxist orthodoxy. Nkrumah's affinity for Marxist socialism, even when he disavowed communism itself, goes back to his sojourn in the United States from 1935 to 1945. His enduring relationship with George Padmore and W. E. B. Du Bois would provide the reference point for his affinity to a mode of Marxist thought that is grounded in anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism (Afari-Gyan 1991; Biney 2011; James 2015). Even so, before the mid-1960s, Nkrumah's characterisation of intra-African social structure was closer to Nyerere's than the orthodox Marxist idea of class and class division.

If Nkrumah's preference in *Consciencism* (1964) and onwards is for 'scientific socialism', Nyerere would better fit the characterisation of socialism as an attempt to reconcile human equity with modern technology. Senghor's 'African socialism' is more akin to its characterisation by Nkrumah as anthropology. Nyerere's thoughts and modes of statecraft are suffused with a constant reaffirmation of the norms of egalitarianism and solidarity in a manner that is difficult to match in postcolonial Africa – indeed, not even by Nkrumah in the years he was in power. What socialist thought in Africa must retrieve is not 'the structure of the "traditional African society," but its spirit, for the spirit of communalism is crystallized in its humanism and in its reconciliation of individual advancement with group welfare' (Nkrumah 1973: 441). What it calls for is a philosophical, not an anthropological, approach.

Variations in Pan-African Vision

The choice imbued in the postcolonial state manifests in the obverse of colonial segmentation: the vision of pan-Africanism as the unity of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora.

Senghor's pan-African vision, it could be argued, is more cultural and aesthetic than political. While he pushed, in 1959, with Modibo Keita for the Mali Federation – understood as a prelude to a wider political and economic union of former West African French colonies with other Monrovia Bloc countries – he balked at an immediate or medium-term vision of a continental political union. Nkrumah (1962b; 1963a) would emerge as the most ardent advocate of African political union in the immediate future, in terms of both practical and metaphysical continental unity. For Nyerere:

Indissoluble African unity is the stone bridge which would enable us to walk in safety over [the] whirlpool of power politics, and enable us to carry more easily the economic and social loads which now threaten to overwhelm us (1963: 1).

However, Nyerere (1963: 3) was sceptical of Nkrumah's campaign for an immediate move towards a continental union government. For him, the objective of a United States of Africa was long-term, rather than an immediate project. Nkrumah was beset at home and abroad with loathing and suspicion for his campaign for a union government (Nyerere 2013a) – a pan-African vision that is immediately political. Senghor's more cultural vision manifested in the hosting of the First World Festival of Black (Negro) Art in Dakar in April 1966.

Yet, a minimal programme of consociation among African countries brought the different countries together to form the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa in May 1963. The OAU is often vilified as a failed institution, but in the limited objectives it set for itself, it was remarkably successful. Its commitment to ending formal colonial rule, with the establishment of the Liberation Committee, was brought to finality in 1994 with the end of White Minority rule in South Africa. Even when the liberation of Southern Africa was not considered feasible, the OAU, as an expression of the collective vision of liberation, stayed the course.³ At the same time, it is true that the Cairo Declaration of 1964⁴ declared the integrity of inherited colonial boundaries and non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states as sacrosanct. Senghor's vision of pan-Africanism that reaches to the diaspora is visible in the formal designation of the Diaspora as the sixth region of the AU.

Construction of Postcolonial Nationhood

'Independence and nation-building', Senghor (1964: 83) reminds us, 'require, first, along with self-determination, freedom of choice'. It is this concern for self-determination from colonial control that underpins much of the 'nationalist' drive for independence. But even here there are degrees of autonomy and constitution of the freedom to choose. In this sense, Senghor would be on one side of the continuum and Nkrumah and Nyerere on different points at the other end of the continuum. Senghor was profoundly francophile to a degree to which would be unimaginable for Nkrumah or Nyerere to be anglophile. Senghor explained the demand for independence in the same way in which a child, when fully grown, sets up a home separate from his/her family of orientation: 'When sons come of age they find a home; they loosen family ties but do not break them. To a considerable extent, we are the spiritual sons of France' (Senghor 1964: 23). The short-lived Mali Federation (1959–60), and Senegal's postcolonial future was firmly rooted in the French Community with a degree of monetary control by France, unimaginable in Ghana or Tanzania. The choice that Senghor remarked

on is a choice to remain attached to France. For Nkrumah and Nyerere, on the other hand, the postcolonial state they envisioned was one in which independence is a sovereign project to determine who one's friends are and the source of one's statehood and policy choices. Much more than Nkrumah, however, it was Nyerere who pressed home the reconstitution of the inherited colonial state. As Mamdani (2012: 3) notes, Nyerere's statecraft 'not only effectively decolonized the indirect rule state but in so doing provides us with a nonviolent alternative to a Leninist vision of "smashing the state."' From the dissolution of colonial chiefdoms to the adoption of Kiswahili as an official national language, the effort at dissolving the colonial state was probably more advanced in Tanzania than anywhere else on the continent. I explore the implications for the nation-building project below.

If the issue of continental unity and engagement with Western imperial powers represents an aspect of diverse visions of postcolonial statehood, equally urgent is the vision of nation-building. Colonialism was not simply about foreign domination, but also imposing internal fragmentation in its technology of indirect rule. What Senegal, Ghana and Tanzania shared, in contrast to countries such as Nigeria, were the national forms of the dominant independence movements with Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere as recognised national leaders of the movements. Additionally, Senghor, Nyerere and Nkrumah all shared a vision of trans-ethnic national identities that marked their contemporary national politics apart from countries such as Nigeria or Kenya. In each of the three cases, they had to contend with powerful pre-existing domestic forces. They vary in the manner in which each navigated these pathways towards creating some degree of coherent national identities.

The antecedent of Nkrumah's CPP would mean that the contestation to the legitimacy of national leadership was much more intense than in the cases of Senghor and the Socialist Party or Nyerere and TANU or Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). Much more than in Senegal and Tanzania, Nkrumah and the CPP confronted a virulent opposition that was as ethnic and religious as it was regional. At independence, the main opposition formation, the National Liberation Movement, was centred around the Ashanti region but sought to draw to itself disparate religious and regional opposition clusters, including the northern region and Togoland (Biney 2011; Killick 2010). Nkrumah's more Leninist conception of the state and party both provoked, and was in response to, an opposition that was not too reticent about the use of violence and assassination attempts. First in 1955 and then in 1962 (Biney 2011: 116), the January 1964 assassination attempt was the fifth on the life of Nkrumah (Reuters News Agency 1964). Yet, Nkrumah's vision and policy were pan-national and concerned with bridging regional gaps

in social and economic indicators. The self-conscious building of pan-national political parties, beyond and above ethnic or religious cleavages, was something that Nkrumah shared with Senghor and Nyerere. In part, it reflects their pan-Africanist commitment and internationalist orientation.

Nkrumah's path to the creation of a pan-Ghanaian identity, as noted earlier, perhaps faced more ethnic and regional opposition than Senghor and Nyerere. In Nkrumah's case, the opposition was driven, in large part, by an established colonial-era African middle class, a rich merchant class, and a predominantly Ashanti traditional leadership (Biney 2011; Killick 2010). Nonetheless, the pan-African vision that drove the CPP and Nkrumah involves a self-definition as pan-Ghanaian rather than sectional.

Confronting Senghor at independence were powerful religious brotherhoods and religious leaders much more than ethnic groups. For someone from a minority ethnic sub-group (Sere) and religion (Catholic Christian) in a predominantly Wolof and Muslim country, Senghor's mode of statecraft was to create a mutually beneficial alliance with the main Muslim Brotherhoods in Senegal (Diop 1993).

Nyerere's path to pan-Tanzanian nationhood is a combined product of value-based governance and the deliberate policy of the construction of national identity. The value-based approach to politics and nation-building was central to Nyerere's project in Tanzania. At the heart of this were the twin factors of affirmation of all human beings and fear of division – national and pan-African. The effect was a project of wielding a multi-ethnic, multi-racial country into one with a common identity. Nyerere and CCM's efforts ranged from the creative use of social policy (the design and implementation of education policy) for nation-building, abrogation of colonial chiefdoms (at least de-coupling them from local level exercise of political power), a shared endogenous official language (in Kiswahili), pan-territorial planning, and the political party as a national institution (Senkoro 2017; Bjerck 2015; Fouere 2014; Chachage and Cassam 2010). The creative use of secondary education placement for young Tanzanians – allocating them to schools in areas other than those of their birth and ensuring intensive interaction with the local communities – had the effect of obviating ethnic accretion (Senkoro 2017). As Mamdani (2012) reminds us, Nyerere's Tanzania is arguably Africa's most successful nation-building project.

All three African intellectual-leaders were driven by a robust rejection of the politics of ethnicity. The nation-building projects they embarked upon should be seen in the context of their varied pan-African agenda, continental and diasporic. It is remarkable how their three countries stand out for the vibrancy of their commitments to national rather than ethnic identity.

Variations in Modalities of Economic Development

The third pillar of postcolonial imagination was the negation of colonial underdevelopment. While Senghor's government persisted with the inherited colonial economy, significant efforts and investments were made (Sylla 1993). Nonetheless, export earnings remained largely dominated by groundnuts (Mbodj 1993), and the economic growth rate over that period was largely tepid, averaging 2.71 per cent per annum (Boye 1993). Ghana under Nkrumah represented the most ambitious industrialisation effort (Nkrumah 1959; 1962a) – from the construction of new ports (Tema) to the Akosombo Dam, which intended to provide electricity for domestic and industrial consumers, and the setting up of new manufacturing facilities. In both Ghana and Tanzania, significant social investment was made in the fields of education and healthcare services. Nkrumah's injunction to 'seek ye first the political kingdom' was in full awareness of the economic and social corollaries that political independence affords. As Nkrumah (1963a: 50) himself argued:

Seek ye first the political kingdom,' became the principal slogan of the Convention People's Party, for without political independence, none of our plans for social and economic development could be put into effect.

Nkrumah's injunction has been a subject of lampooning – something that dates to Ali Mazrui's (1966; 1999) gross misreading. Mazrui's misrepresentation is replicated in sources as diverse as Kanbur (2016), Olorunfoba and Falola (2018), and among 'decolonial scholars'. For the latter, it is to cast the injunction as evidence of the over-inflation of the political over the epistemic. Mazrui himself read the injunction as a failure to see the political as a necessary but not sufficient condition. It is as if Nkrumah assumed that 'seeking the political kingdom' was a disembodied end in itself. In *Towards Colonial Freedom*, Nkrumah (1962c: xv) had argued that 'the basis of colonial territories dependence is economic, but the basis of the solution to the problem is political. Hence political independence is an indispensable step towards securing economic emancipation.'

For Nkrumah, the 'epistemic', an insistence on one's capacity to think for oneself on one's terms, was as important as the economic and the political (Biney 2011). I return to the question of epistemic emancipation later below. It is important to note that the manuscript that became *Towards Colonial Freedom* was first published as a pamphlet in 1947. The arguments were similar to those Nkrumah advanced in his 1942 doctoral thesis, which had been rejected by the University of Pennsylvania (Biney 2011: 23). The 1947 manuscript was published in 1962 in its original form.

Right from his 1947 pamphlet, industrialisation was, for Nkrumah, the linchpin of economic development and the process of securing economic freedom. The CPP, in its 1962 programme, had argued that 'the aim of our economic development is to make Ghana free of alien control of its economy and thus support our political independence with economic independence' (Killick 2010: 44). The most prominent of the economic and infrastructural projects in Ghana under Nkrumah was the Volta River Project. The hydroelectric power project was intended to supply the electricity that Ghanaians require as part of the modernisation project and industry in the industrialisation project (Killick 2010; Biney 2011; Williams, Mul, Biney et al. 2016). However, export earnings – in the context of the limited timeframe for diversifying the economy – remained dependent on primary commodity exports.

If Nkrumah's aspiration was for the rapid industrialisation of Ghana as the basis for economic independence and modernisation, Nyerere took a different path. Nyerere's focus on rural development as the basis for Tanzania's development was based on his characterisation of Tanzania/Tanganyika as a predominantly rural economy. For him, the village would, for quite some time, be the location of most Tanzanians. As Nyerere (1967a; 1968: 51) argues, 'it is, therefore, the villages which must be made into places where people lived a good life; it is the rural areas where people must be able to find their material well-being and their satisfactions.' This was not to suggest that Nyerere was blind to non-rural development issues. As Chachage (2007: 91) notes, manufacturing grew at an annual rate of 7.5 per cent between 1965 and 1974, the share of the manufacturing sector in the economy grew from 4 per cent in 1961 to 11 per cent in 1975, and the share of agriculture in the economy declined from 42 per cent in 1965 to 36 per cent in 1975. Nyerere's reasoning about rural development derives from his idea that development is not about things but about enabling people to live 'a good life' and enhance their material well-being; it is about meeting people where they are. Nyerere's rural development thinking evolved through two distinct phases: the 'model farmer' phase based on the World Bank's advice, and the villagisation phase following the 1967 Arusha Declaration (Kamuzora 2010; Shivji 2010). The latter phase is itself divided into two sub-phases – the smallholder farmers voluntarily moving into villages and the *Vijiji* phase involving the compulsory relocation of the rural population into villages. The overall assessment of these forms of rural development is that they were unsuccessful and Nyerere himself would admit to the failures of the villagisation programme (Mkandawire 1999).

Whatever the successes and failures of the actual design and implementation of the efforts at diversifying the economies away from the inherited colonial political economy, Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere shared commitments to this objective to different degrees. In the case of Ghana, the reversal of the Nkrumah-era economic policies makes it difficult to determine what the impact of the industrialisation drive might be. In this instance, the IMF intervention in Ghana in the second half of the 1960s would signal what awaited the rest of the continent during the lost decades of neoliberalism.

On the Epistemic Dimensions of Postcolonialism

To return to the opening narratives of decolonial discourse, the casual dismissal of efforts at decolonisation and the constitution of the sovereign project in Africa stands in sharp contrast to the decolonial intellectual's capacity to apprehend the project deemed impossible at the political and social levels – decolonial epistemology. The caricature of Nkrumah's dictum of 'seek ye first the political kingdom' has, as indicated earlier, been the fodder for claims of the over-inflation of the political relative to economic and the epistemic freedom. It is within the charge for 'decoloniality' that the supposed neglect of the knowledge production basis of coloniality is most widely pressed in the claim concerning the deficiencies in 'nationalist' thinking and practice (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a; 2018). The political in the decolonisation project is not only presented as separate from the economic and epistemic, but as an inferior project that displaces the imperative of addressing the psycho-intellectual adverse impact of colonialism specifically, and coloniality broadly. The 'political kingdom' was pursued to the neglect of the epistemic, we are told. First, this broadside is often erected on a flattening of the African leadership space: 'African leaders' are generally presented in an undifferentiated manner.⁶

While we have focused so far on the state, society and economy, Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere were no less acutely aware of the colonial epistemological project and the need to transcend it. Indeed, Diagne's (2016) re-reading of Negritude as epistemology, especially the Senghorian version, is in the dissolution of the Cartesian binary opposition of subject/object. Whatever one's take on the specificity of Senghor's claims of Africa's modes of knowing, it was in the insistence on the interconnectedness of subject/object that he, self-consciously, sought to mark out what is deficient in modern European epistemology and what he sought to valorise in African systems of knowledge. This epistemological projection is erected on a distinct African ontological premise – a premise characterised as *African personality*.

Similarly, as argued earlier, the thoughts of Nkrumah and Nyerere around the idea of African socialism – whatever their limitations – are premised on specific ideas of African ontological locations and modes of sociality, which in turn inform the ethics of constituting the postcolonial society they imagined. In perhaps the most philosophical of his works, Nkrumah (1964: 78) insisted that while Western and Islamic sources coexist with the ‘traditional’ in shaping contemporary Africa, the earlier two ‘must be accommodated only as experiences of the traditional African society. If we fail to do this, our society will be racked by the most malignant schizophrenia. Our attitude to the Western and the Islamic experience must be purposeful.’ It is, after all, important to recollect that the subtitle of *Consciencism* is ‘philosophy and ideology for *de-colonisation*.’

Nkrumah and Nyerere were most acutely aware of the epistemic conditions of colonisation that required urgent displacement (Nyerere 1962b; 1967a; Nkrumah 1964; 1965: 239). In the case of Nkrumah, the most explicit expressions of the imperative of epistemic decolonisation were most forcefully expressed in the launch, in 1962, of the *Encyclopaedia Africana* project, under the directorship of W. E. B. Du Bois (Nkrumah 1968: 138; Contee 1971), and the setting up of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana (Nkrumah 1963b). Nkrumah’s speech at the launch of the Institute is particularly forceful in pinpointing the epistemic erasure at the heart of colonialism, and the link between political freedom and epistemic freedom. ‘It is only in conditions of total freedom and independence from foreign rule and interferences that the aspirations of our people will see real fulfilment and the African genius finds its best expression’ (Nkrumah 1963b: 5). If colonialism involves the study of Africa from the standpoint of the colonialist, the new Institute is charged with studying Africa from the standpoint of Africans. Its responsibility, Nkrumah argues, is profoundly epistemic: the excavation, validation, restoration and valorisation of African knowledge systems. The project is not about a fossilised past but essential for the constitution of the new postcolonial society under construction. The staff and students of the new Institute should ‘embrace and develop those aspirations and responsibilities which are clearly essential for maintaining a progressive and dynamic African society’ (Nkrumah 1963b: 3). The study of Africa’s ‘history, culture, and institutions, languages and arts’ is required to be done in ‘new African centred ways – in entire freedom from the propositions and presuppositions of the colonial epoch, and from the distortions of those Professors and Lecturers who continue to make European studies of Africa the basis of this new assessment’ (Nkrumah 1963b: 3). The Institute was not simply a national institution but pan-African in its reach and composition.

Nkrumah was acutely aware that the end of formal colonialism is not the end of imperialist control. *Neocolonialism*, Nkrumah (1965: 239) argues, is multi-dimensional: 'the methods of neo-colonialists are subtle and varied. They operate not only in the economic field but also in the political, religious, ideological and cultural sphere.' In other words, it is as much in the domain of the economy as it is in systems of knowing and modalities of reasoning. 'For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility, and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress' (Nkrumah 1965: xi).

Like Senghor and Nkrumah, Nyerere's thoughts were premised largely on African ontological conditions, the imperative of negating colonial subordination, and the ethics that would shape the new postcolonial society. Much is made about Nyerere surrounding 'himself with foreign "Fabian socialists"' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018: 177),⁶ yet the most profound intellectual influence on Nyerere's thoughts and practice was not the varieties of European 'socialisms', but the 'socialism' of the African village in which he was born and raised – with its norms of mutuality, convivial hospitality and shared labour. Nyerere's modes of sense-making (that, after all, is what 'epistemology' boils down to) were rooted in this ontology and these norms of sociality. For Nyerere, the ethics that inhere in these norms of sociality stand in sharp contrast to the colonial project. It was perhaps in *Education for Self-Reliance* (1967) that Nyerere most clearly set out the task of the educational system in postcolonial Tanganyika as not simply the production of technical skill but the contents of its pedagogy. It is a pedagogy that requires the transformation of the inherited colonial system of education (Nyerere 1968: 44–75). The purpose of education is inculcating critical human faculty (*ibid.*: 53) and social competencies relevant to a society concerned with self-reliance. The pedagogy of the education system in the new society will be anchored on the three principles of Nyerere's (*ibid.*: 50) idea of a socialist society: 'quality and respect for human dignity; sharing of the resources which are produced by our efforts; work by everyone and exploitation by none.' Whatever one makes of Nyerere's idea of the new society as socialist, the idea that it was politics devoid of sensitivity to issues of epistemology and pedagogy would be misguided.

Whatever the limitations of the thoughts and practices of Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere, the contemporary community of African intellectuals are the inheritors of the legacies of the anti-colonial struggle. Postcolonial Africa, with all its deficiencies, provided the space for a new generation of Africans to re-imagine modalities of thinking and sociality that take Africa as its locus. The Ibadan School of History, the Dar School, or the Dakar

School, with their varied takes on historiography, would be unimaginable in colonial Africa. The advancement in knowledge and experimentations around Yorùbá ontological narratives that animated University of Ife in the 1970s could only have been undertaken in a postcolonial Nigeria. Each in various ways contested and sought to displace the Eurocentric gaze and modalities of thought. From protest scholarship to works of epistemic rupture, each generation of African intellectuals must build on the works of earlier generations without seeking to diminish the significance of contexts provided for the new generation to question and to flourish.

Democratic Deficit

The democratic deficit is what all three countries and leaders share to varying degrees. By the late 1960s (or Nkrumah's overthrow in 1966) each had turned into single-party states. The fact that only the CCM of the three political parties associated with the subject of this enquiry remains a dominant political party in the respective countries suggests the need to pay attention to the distinction between dominance derived from political force, state power and hegemony. Nkrumah's CPP's increasing adoption of the Leninist party model and promotion of the personality cult around Nkrumah himself shifted the CPP from the mass party of the 1950s to a single-party that derived its dominance from the coupling of party and state, and the exertion of state power. The opposition's inclination for terror tactics – the detonation of explosives in public places and assassination attempts – as well as sectarianism stiffened the state's resort to repressive tactics against all oppositions, real or perceived.

Senegal's retreat into single-party rule emerged quite early. In the lead up to the March 1959 legislative elections (and before independence), the government dominated by the Senegalese Progressive Union (UPS)⁷ amended the electoral law. The amendment awarded all seats in the legislature to the party with the largest share of the votes (Gellar 2005). With the resolution of the internal party dispute between Mamadou Dia and Senghor, resolved in Senghor's favour, Senghor moved quickly to centralise party and state powers. Dia, who had been the Prime Minister between 1957 and December 1962, was imprisoned. Senghor eliminated the post of prime minister (Beck 1997; Gellar 2005). In 1964, Senghor's government banned several opposition political parties, including Cheikh Anta Diop's Front National Sénégalais; 'the legal opposition totally disappeared in June 1966 when [Parti du Regroupement Africain-Sénégal] rallied to [Senghor's Socialist Party]' (Gellar 2005: 45).

CCM's dominance would, at least in mainland Tanzania, seem to derive more from hegemony than force, its roots being in every village and town in the country. Even as a single party, the projection of internal party democracy, and giving the population choice in the election of representatives to parliament and local assemblies, created a quasi-democratic culture that would signal to the electorate that their voice matters (however circumscribed).

In December 1980, Senghor stepped down as president of Senegal. Similarly, in November 1985, Nyerere stepped down from the presidency of Tanzania (Chachage and Cassam 2010). The opening up of the democratic space in Senegal began in 1974 with the recognition of Abdoulaye Wade's Senegalese Democratic Party, under Senghor, with full multi-party democratic order following under Abdou Diouf in 1981 (Buuba 1993; Gellar 2005). Nkrumah's overthrow, while driven predominantly by imperial forces, was nonetheless based on significant internal opposition.

Lessons for Contemporary Africa

I address the lessons for contemporary Africa that can be derived from Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere from two broad perspectives. The first concerns lessons for the contemporary pan-African project, which speaks to continental (and diaspora) issues. The second concerns what I call sovereign national projects and policy autonomy, which speaks more to national and sub-regional levels, but is broadly applicable to continental African concerns.

Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere represent variations in postcolonial pan-African imaginations. If Nkrumah's drive for a continental government failed to gain traction, it is perhaps Nyerere's emphasis on unity, even if the journey takes much longer, that seems to have endured. In the last sixty years, the pan-African project has endured at state, associational and inter-subjective levels. Nyerere's longevity and convivial personality meant that even after voluntarily resigning as President of Tanzania in 1985, his global stature continued to grow. His moral authority provided him much leverage in advancing the pan-African agenda in development, regional integration, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and people-to-people pan-African efforts. In many ways, Nyerere's voice and sway are much needed today for contemporary pan-African projects. At the heart of the pan-African project remains a *leitmotif* of Nyerere: unity. As he argued at the 40th Anniversary Lecture on the Independence of Ghana in 1997:

Unity will not end our weakness, but until we unite, we cannot even begin to end that weakness. So this is my plea to the new generation of African leaders and African peoples: work for unity with the firm conviction that without unity, there is no future for Africa (Nyerere 2013a).

This is foundational to addressing issues of development, regional integration, conflict resolution/peacebuilding and people-to-people pan-Africanism. The pursuit of inclusive development is related to issues of regional integration, but as Mwalimu never failed to reiterate, it is a development project that must be value-based and driven by cultivation of local resources (human, material and financial), not one dependent on external resources. ‘The development of our own countries is above all our responsibility. If the countries of the South want development, they will have to initiate it themselves by making clear political choices’ (Nyerere 2010: 73). The ability to ground development in ethics of equity and mutuality is fundamental for achieving inclusive development. This is in sharp contrast to the prevailing neoliberal take on African integration that privileges free movement of trade and capital over the lives of ordinary Africans. Inclusive development would not simply be about giving out morsels to the ‘deserving poor’, but the active pursuit of growth with structural transformation wedded to the advancement of the quality of human lives. In such a context, free movement of people – an integral element of the pan-African project – will be less of a frightening prospect for the economically prosperous poles of the continent. The attempt to escape deprivation, harm and social collapse will not be a primary push factor in such intra-African mobility.

Beyond official level activities and efforts, pan-Africanism will continue to be driven by people-to-people engagement at individual and associational levels. Beyond the pan-African project at the continental and global level, a major lesson of the postcolonial project is in the effort to construct sovereign national projects and pursue policy autonomy.

In the last major interview given by Julius Nyerere with Ikaweza Bunting, Mwalimu reflected on the social progress made in Tanzania before structural adjustment, and after:

I was in Washington last year. At the World Bank, the first question they asked me was ‘how did you fail?’ I responded that we took over a country with 85 per cent of its adult population illiterate. The British ruled us for 43 years. When they left, there were 2 trained engineers and 12 doctors. This is the country we inherited.

When I stepped down, there was 91-per-cent literacy, and nearly every child was in school. We trained thousands of engineers and doctors and teachers.

In 1988 Tanzania’s per-capita income was \$280. Now, in 1998, it is \$140. So I asked the World Bank people what went wrong. Because for the last ten years Tanzania has been signing on the dotted line and doing everything the IMF and the World Bank wanted. Enrolment in school has plummeted to 63 per cent, and conditions in health and other social services have deteriorated. I

asked them again: 'what went wrong?' These people just sat there looking at me. Then they asked what could they do? I told them have some humility. Humility – they are so arrogant! (Bunting 1999)

At the heart of the achievements in Tanzania that Mwalimu referred to above are the postcolonial efforts shaped by the construction of sovereign national projects and the pursuit of policy autonomy, shaped differently by the realities of the specific national contexts of Senegal, Ghana and Tanzania. This arcs back to the issue of agency that Mkandawire highlighted above. As mentioned earlier, the models pursued differ in each country. At the level of the political society, the three countries shared a commitment to creating trans-ethnic national identities that bound their citizens together. At the heart of the economic models pursued by the different countries under their respective leaders was the extension of the public sector of the economy and the provision of social services. The training of doctors, engineers, teachers, etc., that Mwalimu referred to, was tied to an overall vision of economic development and the enhancement of citizens' wellbeing. The capacity to respond to local specificities of their countries reflect varying degrees of policy autonomy in the early postcolonial period. If 'nation-building' was an important focus grafted to economic development, in the early postcolonial period, public control over social policy and service provisioning allowed the extension of health and education facilities to diverse areas of the countries. It is easy to build a state-citizen nexus where the state embraces its responsibilities to enhance the wellbeing of its citizens. The design of education provisioning to explicitly promote nation-building and trans-ethnic national identities requires public control over not simply education policy but facilities as well. Similarly, it requires public provisioning of education services at little or no cost at the point of consumption for citizens. Otherwise, how does the state relocate learners from one end of the country to another if access is dependent on the individual's command over market resources?

The lost decade(s) that Mwalimu reflects upon above is not simply about the subversion of the postcolonial project and the deification of the market as a normative determinant of access to resources. At heart, the neoliberal project was about the subversion of sovereign national projects and policy autonomy. Where the different countries in their pre-adjustment phases – and for Ghana, this goes back to the first IMF intervention in 1967 – responded to nuances of the local contexts, neoliberalism imposed a single model, abstracted from reified market transactional logic. Yet, in relation to the nation-building project, which required infusing social purpose to public policy, the market inhabits no social purpose. The idea that one could use market-based access to education to build national unity or develop a new

generation with consciousness beyond the ethnic is an oxymoron. More fundamental in addressing the challenges that African countries face in the twenty-first century is (re-)building the state-citizen nexus infused with the state's enthusiastic embrace of its obligation to advance the welfare and wellbeing of *all* its peoples, not simply the 'deserving poor'. As Africa seeks to emerge from the lost decades, a central lesson is a return to the construction of sovereign national projects and the pursuit of policy sovereignty.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted the diversity of postcolonial imaginations, even among those intellectual-political leaders who claim the mantle of African socialism. The three who have been the focus of this review were some of the most cerebral postcolonial African leaders. They shared a broad commitment to varying visions of pan-Africanism and a nation-building project concerned with creating trans-ethnic and trans-racial identities for their countries. They all shared different degrees of commitment to the construction of sovereign national projects, underpinned by efforts at driving economic development and advancing the wellbeing of their citizens – even if Senghor's version was more tempered than those of Nkrumah and Nyerere. Their ideas were not simply 'practical' but underpinned by deep visions of epistemic emancipation. All three shared a broad commitment to ideas and political praxis that embraced a wider humanity than simply 'the African', even if this was their locus of engagement with the rest of the world.

Yet in spite of their broad ideational affinity, they differ in most of the things that preoccupied them and their postcolonial visions. The contexts in which they assumed the leadership of their countries mattered in the construction of the postcolonial societies they envisioned. The nature of the powerful local forces against which they had to contend – for Senghor the powerful Muslim brotherhoods, for Nkrumah, the ethnic-traditional chiefs and 'educated middle classes' – shaped the terrain of their postcolonial projects. In this, Nyerere might have had a more conducive environment in reconfiguring the inherited colonial system of governance. Perhaps much more than Senghor and Nkrumah, for Nyerere the challenge of postcolonial state construction was not simply about transcending ethnic division, but racial divisions as well.

In economic terms, Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere mapped out three distinct, if compatible, visions of postcolonial economic development. Nkrumah was, perhaps, the most ambitious in the push for industrialisation and Nyerere more oriented towards rural development, yet in each case, they were open to learning from the failings of earlier variants of their visions.

The pan-African ambitions of Nkrumah and Nyerere were perhaps more aligned in the search for continental governance structure even when the speed at which they were willing to achieve it differed. Senghor and Nkrumah were more immediately expansive in incorporating the African diaspora in their imaginations of African unity, although this was not an idea with which Nyerere would disagree.

Even for these three most cerebral African leaders, it is difficult to speak of 'African leaders' or the postcolonial project in a singular – a tendency that is increasingly dominant these days. Not only is it difficult to speak of Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere in the singular, it becomes more absurd when individuals such as Mobutu Sese Seko and Idi Amin are presented as epitomising nationalist leadership in the postcolonial era.

In the context of the 'decolonial' discourse, with its fundamental argument of the illusion of decolonisation, the flattening of the African leadership landscape is tied to caricaturing. Accordingly the pursuit of political independence was undertaken to the splendid neglect of the 'epistemic'. In the earlier variation of this caricature, Nkrumah's injunction of 'seek ye first the political kingdom' was presented by Ali Mazrui as a deficient obsession with political power to the neglect of the economic. This caricature flies in the face of numerous instances of Nkrumah's understanding of political independence as a necessary precondition for other projects of decolonisation – even in the same text where he first made the statement. In the current variation of the caricature, it is the neglect of the epistemic that is presented as the deficient underbelly of Nkrumah's injunction. I have demonstrated that rather than something outside the imaginations of Nkrumah (or Nyerere and Senghor), the decolonisation of the mind and the constitution of a decolonised epistemology was at the heart of Nkrumah and Nyerere's project.

Even more significant, beyond sophistry, it is difficult to imagine Nkrumah and Nyerere without appreciating their subversions of colonial modalities of thought, sense-making and sociality. In varying degrees, their intellectual efforts were grounded in African ontological narratives. In Senghor, most explicitly, Negritude was posed in sharp contrast to what he considered Hellenic modalities of thought and sense-making. Nkrumah and Nyerere relied on modes of African social constitution for framing their embrace of norms of equity and mutuality. Even in his claims of adherence to Marxist socialism, the originating premise for Nkrumah are the African conditions and value of what he considered African pre-colonial modes of sociality in the constitution of the postcolonial society. It is, perhaps, in Nyerere that this is most persistently stated.

Whatever their limitations, the failure of Nkrumah, Nyerere and Senghor (in their diversity) was not for lack of aspiration and imagination. Nyerere is the one who most aptly communicated to us the responsibility of the current generation to pick up the baton where the older generation laid it down. The struggle for political independence was never understood as an end in itself. It was intended as the beginning of a long march in our emancipation. The postcolonial ('flag independence' as it may be) makes possible the task that subsequent generations must undertake and fulfil. The task of realising the postcolonial vision is as much a responsibility of the current generation as it was of the older generation. Finally, as Mwalimu reminds us, on matters concerning Africa, 'the sin of despair would be the most unforgivable' (Nyerere 2013a). That starts with acknowledging and embracing the positive efforts of the older generation while advancing the postcolonial pan-African project.

There are lessons that the contemporary postcolonialism project in Africa can take from the thoughts and political praxis of Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere. I have highlighted two such efforts: the new agenda for sustaining pan-Africanism, and the reconstitution of sovereign national projects and policy autonomy. Postcolonialisms today must rest on a firm commitment to the sovereign advancement of the economy, social relations, social institutions and wellbeing. It requires paying attention to the nuances of national specificities and the use of public policy instruments to advance national wellbeing and the welfare of all who live within the political jurisdiction.

Notes

1. I use postcolonialism to refer to the period after the formal end of colonial rule. The work of the Chair is funded by South Africa's National Research Foundation and the University of South Africa. This article was completed as part of the Post-Colonialisms Today project.
2. The lecture was delivered at the University of Oxford in October 1961.
3. The continuing Moroccan colonisation of the Saharawi Democratic Republic remains the only blight on this splendid record of the continental organisation. The re-admission of Morocco into the AU further complicates the vision of total liberation of the continent.
4. While the 1964 Declaration seems absurd given the shared sense of incongruity of colonial borders, Mwalimu (Nyerere 2013a) reminds us of the immediacy of the problem: 'Ethiopia and Somalia were [already] at war over inherited borders.'
5. See Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a: 83).
6. Ndlovu-Gatsheni cited Mkandawire (2005: 24) for this claim.
7. UPS was the precursor to the Senegalese Socialist Party.

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