

# Educating Africans: Perspectives of Ghanaian Philosophers

**Martin Odei Ajei**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7258-8021>

University of Ghana

odeiajei@gmail.com

## Abstract

This paper reflects on the foundational principles and strategies for tertiary education in Africa. Since the early 1940s, Ghanaian philosophers have advanced unambiguous perspectives on education policy in Africa. Although the integrity and cogency of these perspectives have remained intact for over 60 years, they have not yet found expression in public policy formulation. Available evidence suggests that Africa has so far remained impervious to the perspectives and strategies for education outlined by Ghanaian philosophers since Nkrumah's overthrow from the presidency in Ghana. Current African Union strategies on education, articulated in Agenda 2063, seem to validate the resistance by national governments to these philosophical perspectives. This paper seeks to argue that what these philosophers espouse are excellent conceptual models worthy of development and implementation in Africa; and that in service of a sounder educational future for Ghana and Africa than that which currently prevails, a *sankofa* approach to the conceptualisation of education, which incorporates these Ghanaian philosophical perspectives, is desirable.

**Keywords:** Africa; consciencism; education; Ghanaian philosophers; neo-liberalism; Sankofaism

## Genesis

It would be correct to place the genesis of Ghanaian philosophy of education in a couple of articles authored by Kwame Nkrumah between 1941 and 1943. In fact, a distinction can be drawn between an earlier Nkrumah and a later Nkrumah regarding his philosophy of education. Whereas his earlier work emphasises a necessary connection between education and culture, the later Nkrumah goes further to develop a philosophical orientation for conceptual decolonisation with a view to eliciting "the African genius."



Phronimon

<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/Phronimon>

Volume 19 | 2018 | #5277 | 15 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/5277>

ISSN 2413-3086 (Online)

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Foremost among his early works is “Primitive Education in West Africa,” published in January 1941. In this paper, Nkrumah argues for the strict relationship between education and the context in which it is meant to be applied. He defines education as exposure designed to prepare an individual for participating efficiently in the activities of life, and advances the thesis that education should, therefore, guide its recipients into the “fullest and most fruitful relationship with the culture and ideals of the society in which [they find] themselves, thereby fitting [them] for the struggle of life” (Nkrumah 1941, 87). The second work, “Education and Nationalism in Africa,” echoes the thesis of the first by affirming education as the most potent instrument for the preservation and progression of culture, and arguing that colonial education in West Africa subverts this aim of education (Nkrumah 1943, 32–34).

The third contribution of Nkrumah (1949–1945) which directs this paper, is “Mind and Thought in Primitive Society: A Study in Ethno-Philosophy” (hereafter “Mind and Thought”). This work undoubtedly constitutes the beginnings of Nkrumah’s and Ghanaian philosophy of education. The work is a PhD thesis, which Nkrumah intended to submit to the University of Pennsylvania for partial fulfilment of the award of a doctoral degree<sup>1</sup> in philosophy. This thesis records a few remarkable achievements worth mentioning.

First, “Mind and Thought” shares with “Knowledge and Logical Positivism”<sup>2</sup> and *Consciencism* the distinction of being the only works that Nkrumah consciously meant to be works of philosophy. Second, it is worth observing that “Mind and Thought” introduced the term “ethno-philosophy” into the philosophical vocabulary. As is well known, this notion has been much debated in attempts to delineate the nature and ambit of African philosophical thought and continues to be contested in African philosophy.

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1 The most probable period for the composition of this work is between 1943 and 1945, at the earliest. From the details of his studies in the USA, as narrated in his autobiography, Nkrumah discloses that he earned a BA in Economics and Sociology at Lincoln University in 1939; a Bachelor of Theology at the same university in 1942; an MA in Education at the University of Pennsylvania in 1942; and an MA in Philosophy at the same university in 1943, after which he “began to prepare himself for the doctorate of philosophy examinations” (Nkrumah 2002, 31–33). We can suppose, from this, that work on the thesis commenced after the MA in Philosophy and is likely to have continued until 1945 when he departed from the USA for England intending to study law and “completing his thesis for a doctorate in philosophy.” However, “as soon as he arrived in London [he] ... abandoned the research work that I had been doing in ethno-philosophy, which was the subject of my original thesis, and decided to work on another thesis on what was then a new theory of knowledge, ‘Logical Positivism’,” under Professor A. J. Ayer (Nkrumah 2002, 51). This account of the work receiving his attention after November 1943, is corroborated by the thesis itself: Footnote 24 of its “Conclusion” is a quotation from his own article entitled “Education and Nationalism in Africa,” which appeared in the 1943 issue of a publication called *Educational Outlook*.

2 In his *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, Wiredu (1996, 134) mentions that Nkrumah wrote this thesis in the mid-1940s under the supervision of A.J. Ayer, and was getting ready for its oral defense when he left Britain for Ghana to participate in the leadership of the independence struggle (Wiredu 1996, 22 and 51).

The term has, since Paulin Hountondji's critique of it in 1967,<sup>3</sup> generated intense debate on instances of reflection that can appropriately denote African philosophy, and on the nature and possibility conditions of philosophy generally.

Another significant fact about the thesis is its endorsement of a philosophy of education that clearly suggests the need to counter undesirable effects of Western education on the colonial student. It restates, verbatim, the aim of education provided in "Primitive Education in West Africa" (Nkrumah 1941); and seeks to show that such conceptualisation of the ends of education is customarily pursued in Akan cultures, which persistently strive to equip their educational structures to work toward achieving that goal. Indigenous social structures are capable of achieving this goal insofar as the human mind and its processes are "a socio-historical phenomenon existent in and subject to the influences of its epoch" (Nkrumah 1943–1945, 7). One might object that this statement may shut down the importance of cultural borrowing to the wellbeing of culture, and indicate Nkrumah's subscription to some form of cultural determinism. I am grateful to one of the reviewers for pressing me on this point. In the framework of this article, what the quote means is that resorting to cultural norms is vital for shaping the specific contents of human minds and consciousness and that all human beings handle the same materials transmitted to them through culture.<sup>4</sup> Nkrumah asserts the parity of human cultures on the basis of the shared psychic structure of human beings the world over (Nkrumah 1942–1945, 5–6). Hence, the expressions "primitive" mind and "civilised" mind are "but two ways of viewing the same thing—the objective world" (Nkrumah 1942–1945, vi).

It is worth seeking clarity on what Nkrumah meant by these terms, given the pejorative imports assigned to them in the decades preceding his work. For instance, Levy-Bruhl distinguishes:

... the two mentalities [i.e. African and European] which face to face are so foreign to each other, so divergent in their habits, so different in their means of expression! The European [civilised way] employs abstractions almost without thinking and the simple logical operations have been rendered so easy for him by his language that they cost him no effort. With the primitives, thought and language are of a character almost

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3 Hountondji (2002, 81–84) asserts that his earliest critical focus on "ethno-philosophy" occurs in an article entitled "African Wisdom and Modern Philosophy" presented in a colloquium entitled "African Humanism-Scandinavian Culture: A Dialogue" held in Copenhagen in August 1967.

4 This is so, whether "culture" is understood in the wide sense to describe all aspects characteristic of a particular form of human life, or in a narrow sense to denote only the system of values implicit in it. Nkrumah's thesis insists that "ethno-philosophy" is a philosophical approach to the presuppositions and conclusions of ethnology and anthropology. If we adopt the basic meaning of anthropology as the study of humanity, and of "ethnology" as the concern with a comparative study of different human cultures, then this conclusion can be drawn.

exclusively concrete. In a ... word, our [European] mentality is above all “conceptual,” the other barely so. (Levy-Bruhl 1910, 505–506)

It is reasonable to suppose that Nkrumah knew of views such as Levy-Bruhl’s, given his interest in African cultures and the term “primitive.” It is also reasonable to suppose that he held a contrary view to Levy-Bruhl, given his admission of the sameness of a general “psychic structure” of human beings, and of the mind’s dependence on culture in terms of substantive content. This leaves me inclined to think that Nkrumah perceived all cultures as being equal. Accordingly, “primitive” and “civilised” ways of viewing the world would mean for him two different but equally valuable culturally indexed ways of viewing the objective world.

### ***Consciencism as a Philosophical Guide for Education in Africa***

Nkrumah’s book (1970), *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development*, occupies a paramount place on the continuum of ideas that expound the role of culture in determining, maintaining and advancing strategies for education and development. Despite the two decades that separate “Mind and Thought” and *Consciencism*, the two works belong firmly together in many respects. The two works reach consistent conclusions regarding the value of the intellectual output of traditional African societies and its relevance to fashioning a self-conscious and confident African person and societies. The idea that ideals of traditional African cultures should ground contemporary social institutions thus resonates throughout both works.

At the onset of *Consciencism*, Nkrumah relates how his 10-year stint as a student in the United States played a decisive role in the development of his “philosophical conscience” (Nkrumah 1970, 2). We are told that this development originates in his concern over the “defective approach to scholarship [that] was suffered by different categories of colonial students” (Nkrumah 1970, 3) and its likely negative effect of disengaging them from their relationship with their native cultures. In the study of philosophy, especially, this disengagement risked inclining the colonial student to surrender “his whole personality” to the teachings of the Western tradition, thus rendering him or her vulnerable to accepting “theories of universalism expressed in vague, mellifluous terms” (Nkrumah 1970, 3) and therewith losing sight of fundamental social facts that “condition[s] the immediate life of every colonised African” (Nkrumah 1970, 2). By contrast, an awakened philosophical conscience dictates sensitivity to one’s cultural traditions and social milieu and seeks knowledge as an instrument of national emancipation and integrity” (Nkrumah 1970, 4). Such a philosophical conscience is needed to underlie an African renaissance in which human welfare and social, economic, scientific and technological progress will be managed under a socialist political system with its roots in the egalitarian structures of pre-colonial African

societies (Nkrumah 1970, 73).<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the role of the African philosopher in the conception and elaboration of this renaissance involves challenging one to act as a “spokesman” for one’s culture.

However, what is “conscience,” and in what sense does Nkrumah use it in the cited segments of *Consciencism*? It is difficult to find a universally agreed account of “conscience.” However, a reasonable account of it can be found by proceeding from its roots in the Latin *conscientia*, which means “knowledge within oneself” and from the Akan translation of it as “*tiboa*,” which means “the animal in one’s head.” From these two words, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that conscience implies: 1) an awareness of a conflict within one’s principles, or within these and some external imperative such as a moral or legal norm; and 2) a disposition to resolve such a conflict by means of one’s perception of what is right or wrong.

As a philosopher, Nkrumah must be taken to have been cognisant of the well-established connection between belief and action: that no rational agent acts on the basis of beliefs he or she does not hold. Premised on this assurance, it is easy to agree with Ackah’s claims that “the conscience of *Consciencism* is Nkrumah’s personal conscience, constructed out of his life experiences” (Ackah 2016, 26), and that ethics is at the centre of *Consciencism*, and egalitarianism is the central ethical focus of Nkrumah’s conscience (Ackah 2016, 27 and 33).

Nkrumah asserts, indeed, that contemporary African societies suffer a crisis of conscience emanating from conflicting ideologies and philosophies that animate ordinary life and the activities of social institutions:

African society has one segment which comprises our traditional way of life; it has a second segment which is filled by the presence of the Islamic tradition in Africa; it has a final segment which represents the infiltration of the Christian tradition and culture of Western Europe into Africa, using colonialism and neocolonialism as its primary vehicles. These different segments are animated by competing ideologies. (Nkrumah 1970, 68)

He estimates that, should these conflicting ideologies be allowed to persist without a cogent strategy for harmonising them in a conceptual framework that gears toward development of African societies for Africans, these societies “will be racked by the most malignant schizophrenia” (Nkrumah 1970, 78). Nkrumah argues that such harmony must be forged into an ideology that remains in tune with cardinal principles underlying African traditional ways of life, and that this ideology must employ as its instrument a solidified philosophical statement, which he dubbed *philosophical consciencism* and characterised as “the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of

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5 Here, Nkrumah conceives of socialism as an intellectual descendant of communalism, a method of social organisation which he saw as one of the most prominent common features of the African past.

forces which will enable African society to digest the Western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality” (Nkrumah 1970, 79).

It can be supposed with some confidence that ideas in “Mind and Thought” (Nkrumah 1943–1945) seeded the said awakening of the philosophical conscience of *Consciencism*, since the philosophy of education espoused by the earlier work is fully compatible with the conscience of *Consciencism*. In view of these considerations, it is reasonable to suppose that the energy deployed by Nkrumah in critically deconstructing the prejudices of Western philosophy and anthropology was expended also for the benefit of post-colonial African scholars and teachers, grappling with a conceptual guide for instilling in their students the value of their indigenous cultural products, and reclaiming their misplaced cultural identity.

### **“The African Genius” as a goal of Nkrumah’s Philosophy of Education**

Nkrumah’s philosophy of education ripens in “The African Genius,” a speech delivered at the University of Ghana on October 25 1963, at the instance of the inauguration of the University’s Institute of African Studies (Nkrumah 1979). This speech distils all the works discussed in the previous sections of this essay and focuses them for actual educational policy and practice. In the speech, Nkrumah asks: “What sort of Institute of African Studies does Ghana want and have need of? In what way can it make its own specific contribution to the advancement of knowledge about the peoples and cultures of Africa through past history and through contemporary problems? To what extent are our universities identified with the aspirations of Ghana and Africa?” (Nkrumah 1979, 273). It is not difficult to deduce from these questions a general concern for the conceptual direction of education in Ghana.

He answers these questions by elaborating two “guiding principles,” which in his mind educators in Ghana must constantly bear in mind. “First and foremost, I would emphasise the need for a re-interpretation and a new assessment of factors which make up our past” (Nkrumah 1970, 273) and “the second guiding principle which I would emphasise is the urgent need to search for, edit, publish and make available [African intellectual] sources of all kinds” and to appropriate and publicise “indigenously developed intellectual resources” (Nkrumah 1979, 275). By “re-interpretation and new assessment,” Nkrumah means that academicians must “endeavour to adjust and re-orientate their attitudes and thought to our African conditions and aspirations ... They must embrace and develop those aspirations and responsibilities which are clearly essential for maintaining a progressive and dynamic African society” (Nkrumah 1979, 274).

Undoubtedly, these prescriptions are premised on Nkrumah’s concern that the content of contemporary education in Africa does not remain hostage to the influence of colonial

education and mentality. Colonial education was conceived and constructed as an instrument for maintaining the practical objectives of the apparatus of colonial power, largely through the secularisation of the activity of European missionaries. This served to denigrate and suppress the intellectual products of the cultures of Africa. By contrast, Nkrumah perceived ingenuity in African thought, exemplified among other things by traditional Africa's socialist organisation of society, its elaborate political theories and efficient political institutions, and its highly developed code of morals. Embedded in these pre-colonial practices and forms of political organisation are principles of education worth rescuing from the pejorative ruins of an exclusively Western-constructed intellectual history of humanity, so as to provide the impetus for necessary African social re-construction. Thus, a central tenet of Nkrumah's philosophy of education is to harness time-tested principles in indigenous cultures for contemporary educational practice; and to measure a person's education "in terms of the soundness of his or her power to understand and appreciate the needs of fellow human beings, and to be of service to them. The educated man should be so sensitive to the conditions around him that he makes it his chief endeavour to improve these conditions for the good of all" (Nkrumah 1979, 278).

### **Ghanaian Philosophy of Education Post-Nkrumah**

The themes of Nkrumah's philosophy of education have been developed in various ways by subsequent Ghanaian academic philosophers who occupied chairs in the Department of Philosophy of the University of Ghana. This article will briefly expound three of these. Although they did not author paradigmatic philosophies of education, their concern for the role of philosophy in relation to the problem of the teaching and learning in Africa, and their predilection for grounding the African future in useful values of the past, qualify these later philosophers in this essay. William Abraham (2015, 31) insists that the guiding principles for building institutions and formulating solutions to problems in the future of the continent ought to be those authenticated in African experience and culture. It is worth noting that the tenor of Abraham's utterances in this context suggests that, for him, institutions and solutions are not "authenticated" if they are rooted in theoretical resources that ignore and perhaps even degrade African thought.

Similarly, Kwame Gyekye makes pronouncements that suggest that he would not be opposed to grounding educational philosophy and policy in the normative resources of traditional African life. In a textbook authored for secondary school students, he asserts that African socio-cultural practices can promote development, by which he means "the welfare or the general well-being of the members of a community" (Gyekye 2004, 144), and that the emphasis is placed on communal values. Importantly, for Gyekye, the "politics of consensus, participation and inclusion" that are obtained in traditional political structures are part of these practices (Gyekye 2004, 146). In a more philosophical context, Gyekye writes that political corruption, defined as the illegal, unethical and unauthorised exploitation of one's political or official position for

personal gain or advantage, is rife in current African societies. In his view, mechanisms within the current social and political system, including legal and regulatory frameworks, are inadequate to solve this problem, given that political corruption is essentially a moral problem. Resolving the problem of political corruption does not require reconstructing or even supplementing substantive moral beliefs, values and ideals. What is needed rather is to strengthen the commitment of official Africa to existing moral rules and principles. Several of these values and beliefs can be found in cultural traditions that are replete with normative resources that can in principle engender “modernity,” where the latter is defined as “innovation aimed at bringing about the kinds of progressive changes in the entire aspects of human culture necessary for the enhancement and fulfilment of human life” (Gyekye 2004, 280).

Perhaps the most explicit statement of the centrality of appropriating cultural values for contemporary philosophical practice can be found in Kwasi Wiredu’s prescription for the conceptual decolonisation of African philosophy. This involves two complementary approaches. Firstly, it involves avoiding or reversing the unexamined assimilation of foreign philosophical conceptual frameworks in the thinking of the African philosopher, through critical self-awareness; and secondly, a conscious and dedicated effort to exploit the resources of indigenous conceptual schemes in the work of the African philosopher (Wiredu 1996, 136). Such decolonisation is an imperative brought upon the African philosopher by “the superimposition of foreign categories of thought on African thought systems through colonialism,” through three principal avenues: language, politics and religion (Wiredu 1996, 136).

Wiredu’s point can be illustrated with the problem of a superimposed language for philosophical practice, as language is the most potent tool for education. In his view, which this article upholds, fundamental philosophical concepts are the most fundamental categories of human thought. Therefore, unavoidably, modes of philosophical thought reflect the peculiarities of the culture and environment from which they emanate. However, the education of most African philosophers is conducted through the medium of foreign languages. This raises an elemental problem, for being trained in a language brings with it conceptual baggage. For, “*thinking about* [any philosophical concept, say ‘love’] in English almost inevitably becomes *thinking in* English about them” (Wiredu 1996, 137). However, the conceptual framework, which sustains the meaning of “love” in English, may be radically different from those embedded in our indigenous languages. This renders the African philosopher “constantly in danger of involuntary mental de-Africanisation” (Wiredu 1996, 137), hence the necessity for conceptual decolonisation.

Wiredu (1996) illustrates this with the justification condition of knowledge in Western epistemology, which has been obsessed with overcoming scepticism since the Enlightenment. The Cartesian solution to these sceptical doubts has become the standard test in epistemological inquiry: the hyperbolic doubt, which founded the



discovery of the cogito.<sup>6</sup> On the Cartesian scheme, which is well entrenched in Western epistemology, certainty means the impossibility of error. Western epistemology thus identifies certainty with infallibility. On this account, to say that “I know X with certainty” means “I know that the proposition X is infallible.” In Wiredu’s view, this confuses two things. Moreover, while the English language is a medium well suited to disguise the confusion (Wiredu 1996, 138–139), it is easily revealed in the Akan language, which conceives of certainty in ways that do not exclude the possibility of error. In this language, saying “*me nim pefee*” (“I know very clearly”) is not to invoke intimations of infallibility. For, the conception of knowledge in the Akan language implies that “just because it is possible for me to go wrong, it does not follow that I can never go right” (Wiredu 1996, 140). Put differently, just because it is possible for me to err it does not follow that I can never be absolutely right. Thus, when one considers the questions of knowledge and certainty in Twi, one is unlikely to confuse certainty with infallibility. Certain knowledge does not imply perpetual exemption from error.

At this point, it would perhaps profit the reader to recall that all of these philosophers converge on Nkrumah’s reflections on the usefulness of indigenous concepts for modern education. It is also worth drawing attention to the fact that Wiredu’s conceptual decolonisation is but an extension of Nkrumah’s two guiding principles, especially the first principle that advocates a reinterpretation and reassessment of African history. Such reassessment—and elevation of African thought and culture as worthy channels of conceptually decolonising education in Africa—is enormously important for educating Africans at the tertiary level.

It would be difficult for a present-day teacher and researcher in an African tertiary institution—the final instance of formal education—to deny the pervasive infiltration and entrenchment in our institutions of sediments of the stock strategies of colonial education described by Nkrumah in “The African Genius.” It becomes nothing less than an obligation, therefore, for teachers in such institutions to seek to dislodge the conceptual baggage that has been loaded onto the minds of African students since the commencement of their formal education; or at least make them aware of the presence

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6 The sixteenth century produced two events that had a decisive effect on what reliable knowledge is, and how it can be dependably produced and disseminated without—or with minimum—contamination. The first of these is the publication of Martin Luther’s *Ninety-five Theses or Disputation on the Power of Indulgences*, which legend has it was nailed on the door of the church of Wittenberg Castle, Germany, in October 1517. This had the effect of contesting the near monopoly of the Catholic Church as the producer and disseminator of knowledge. The second involves the chain of events that has come to be characterised as the Copernican Revolution, which arguably began with Nicolas Copernicus’s publication of his treatise *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium 1543*, and which culminated in the paradigm shift from the Ptolemaic cosmological model that described the cosmos as having Earth stationary at the centre of the universe, to the current heliocentric model with the Sun at the centre of the Solar System. The effect of these two events was scathing scepticism, which Cartesian philosophy endeavoured to overcome with the discovery of a foundation of knowledge so certain that doubting its validity ends the doubter in contradiction.

and pernicious effect of such baggage on their perception of the value of their indigenous cultures to human civilisation.

The entreaties of the Ghanaian philosophers for habitual implementation of conceptual decolonisation in our institutions tally with the meaning of education as this author understands it. The word “education” is derived from the Latin *educere*, which means to draw out, much like carving a statue out of wood. In my view, what this means is that education is meant to coax the best out of the educated person, not only as an individual, but as a member of the community. When successful, such coaxing will invest the educated person with character traits, beliefs, dispositions and behavioural patterns that do not exclusively direct themselves to the self-interest of the person. Put differently, through socialisation, educated persons come to acknowledge the role of community in shaping the consciousness and conscience needed to enable them to tease out what is hidden in themselves and in their contexts, and to make these hidden attributes shine. Such a conception of education is more nuanced than the conception of it as the implantation of *techné*—the skill of doing things. It seems that the nuanced meaning of it is easily inferred from the writings of the Ghanaian philosophers. The ideas of the communal value and cultural sources of education, clarified in this section, are easily contrasted with an individualist conception of education, which in my view is characterised by providing the educated person with competence in *techné*. Such an individualistic notion of education is consistent with neo-liberal economics and politics. The section that follows, therefore, explores the link between education as an individualist value and neoliberal thinking.

### **Neoliberal Pedagogy as Current African Philosophy of Education**

Let us now look at how this nuanced conception of education compares with current practice on the continent. The article will employ a particular policy—the Strategic Plan of the University of Ghana—and a Continental framework to illuminate the issues at stake. Since the supposed shift to a unipolar global order, which Francis Fukuyama (1989) characterises as “the end of history,”<sup>7</sup> it is now fanciful to construe the current aims and approaches of education in Africa as largely focused on furthering the agenda of neoliberal globalisation, that promotes a neoliberal pedagogy, which has necessitated “an increasing commodification and privatisation of higher education” (Luescher 2016, 27).

Talk of neoliberal pedagogy invites an understanding of what neoliberalism is, and for this I resort to Harvey’s definition of it as “a theory of political economic practices that

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7 Francis Fukuyama advanced the thesis that the advent of liberal democracy signals the end of the evolution of human culture and the final form of human government (Fukuyama 1989, 304). What this means, with particular reference to Africa, is that liberal democratic thought provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for satisfying the political ends of all people everywhere; hence universalising it is morally defensible.

proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2005, 2). Moreover, by “neoliberal globalisation,” I mean the use of globalisation as an instrument for institutionalising the neoliberal agenda, a phenomenon which Sniegocki, (2008, 322) describes as “the worldwide spread of an economic model emphasising ‘free markets’ and ‘free trade’.” Thus, the role of the state in the framework of neoliberal globalisation is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices and the proper functioning of markets. Such a conception of the organisation of social institutions and the role of the state has engendered the perspective that the goals of education, like those of all social institutions, must be made subservient to the dictates of market principles. Henry Giroux characterises the pedagogical model emanating from this as neoliberal pedagogy, and points to its global diffusion and adoption and its ultimate aim as the “commercialisation, commodification, privatisation and militarisation of education” (Giroux 2011, 12).

The commercialisation and commodification of education in Africa has resulted in the marginalisation of sub-Saharan African institutions in the global intellectual arena. According to Luis (2006, 21), “Africa features less and less and has become a footnote on academic pages. Mainstream journals and conferences in economics seldom feature papers on African issues.” Indeed, such commercialisation and commodification seem to have been endorsed by African institutions and the African Union.

The Strategic Plan (2014–2024) of the University of Ghana may be said to endorse commodification. The vision of strategy is to make the university a “World Class Research-Intensive University over the next decade” (University of Ghana, Strategic Plan 2014–2024, 7), and the mission is “to create an environment that makes University of Ghana increasingly relevant to national and global development” (University of Ghana, Strategic Plan 2014–2024, 9). Yet, the strategic objectives fashioned to guide the achievement of this vision and mission focus on expanding the number of students, increasing teacher/student ratio, and expanding physical infrastructure for lecture delivery (University of Ghana, Strategic Plan 2014–2024, 12). It seems that there are several points of palpable inconsistency between: a) the vision and mission and the strategic objectives of the plan; b) the strategic objectives; and c) the nuanced understanding of education that have just been discussed. Increasing the number of students, unless matched with corresponding recruitment of lecturers, worsens the teacher/student ratio. Moreover, it is difficult to see how the increase in physical infrastructure in itself will meet the goals of the nuanced understanding of education. One would legitimately expect the African Union (AU), as the pan-African body that seeks to own and lead development strategies for the continent, to assign a vital role to the knowledge and values of indigenous African cultures in designing their visions. In 2016, University of Ghana occupied seventh position on the *Times Higher Education* (THE) World University ranking of the top 15 universities in Africa, on the basis of multiple criteria that represent the academic and other resources of university

administration. This placed University of Ghana as the topmost university in the West Africa sub-region in the rankings.<sup>8</sup> THE rankings for 2019 placed University of Ghana as the seventeenth best university in Africa.<sup>9</sup> As THE is a widely accepted ranking scheme, University of Ghana can be taken to be fairly representative of well-to-do universities in Africa. Indeed, African thought is mentioned in the AU's Agenda 2063,<sup>10</sup> which lists seven "aspirations for the Africa we want." These are:

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
  2. An integrated continent, politically united based on the ideals of pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.
  3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.
  4. A peaceful and secure Africa.
  5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics.
  6. An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.
  7. Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.
- (African Union Commission 2015, 2)

Three of these aspirations deserve comment in this paper. These are aspirations 2, 5 and 6. Aspiration 2, elaborated on page 5 of the document, makes no mention of African culture, let alone what role it would play in realising the aspiration of a renaissance. In the elaboration of Aspiration 5, the document, at Section 42 claims: "Pan-African cultural assets (heritage, folklore, languages, film, music, theatre, literature, festivals, religions and spirituality) will be enhanced. The African creative arts and industries will be celebrated throughout the continent, as well as in the diaspora and contribute significantly to self-awareness, wellbeing and prosperity, and to world culture and heritage. African languages will be the basis for administration and integration. African values of family, community, hard work, merit, mutual respect and social cohesion will be firmly entrenched" (African Union Commission 2015, 7); and at Section 44, that "Culture, heritage and a common identity and destiny will be the centre of all our strategies so as to facilitate a pan-African approach and the African Renaissance" (African Union Commission 2015, 8). Moreover, in elaborating Aspiration 6, Section 47 of the document avers: "All the citizens of Africa will be actively involved in decision making in all aspects" (African Union Commission 2015, 8). On the basis of these declarations, one would have expected the agenda to say more about the strategies it would employ to plough indigenous intellectual resources into implementation.

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8 See "Best Universities in Africa." Accessed 10/12/18. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/best-universities-in-africa-2016>.

9 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-africa>. Accessed 10/12/18.

10 Agenda 2063 was authored in 2013 by the African Union Commission as a roadmap for implementing the collective vision and aspiration for Africa's development in the next 50 years.

However, the document is ominously silent on this. Not a single thought can be found in it in this respect. The intellectual resources of African cultures are not mentioned once as of any use in achieving these aspirations. In these ways, the document woefully fails to meet the expectation that it incorporates Africa's indigenous intellectual resources into strategies for actualising the visions of the African renaissance. Accordingly, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the African Union accords trivial significance to Africa's intellectual heritage. With its refusal to effectively utilise Africa's knowledge and value traditions, it would seem the African Union is more interested in benignly showcasing them, in fine words, in the museum of global knowledge production and application.

### **African Education in Need of *Sankofaism*<sup>11</sup>**

The preceding considerations make necessary a reassessment of the conceptualisation and practice of education in Africa to align them with the nuanced meaning of education espoused by the Ghanaian philosophers. There is a great need in the continent to move away from commoditised education that trains students to fit the job market of neoliberal economies.

Let us recall that from Nkrumah onward, Ghanaian philosophy of education has emphasised the necessary connection between education and cultural context, and the need for an educated person to have a fruitful relationship with the ideals of the society in which they live and have their being, and with the welfare of their co-citizens. Neoliberal pedagogy and its underlying philosophy are at variance with this nuanced conception of education. For this reason, it is reasonable to revert to the philosophy of education espoused by these philosophers in shaping the structures of educating the African. It is reasonable, because this is a humane vision of education, espoused by philosophers who are not on the margins of philosophical recognition. Nkrumah's thought towers over the continent and has worldwide recognition, as does that of Wiredu, Abraham and Gyekye. We can be confident, therefore, in resorting to their thought on education.

*Sankofa* is an appropriate metaphor to employ in this task of reclamation for, as a symbol that advocates the retrieval of ancient models of excellence that may be of present relevance, it underscores a view of life in which the present is in constant and active interface with the past for the purpose of constructing the future.

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11 *Sankofa* in the Twi languages of Ghana translates, literally, to "go back and get it." The word also refers to the *adinkra* symbol of the Akans of Ghana, represented by a bird with an egg in its mouth with its head turned backwards while its feet face forward. The symbol underscores a view of life in which the present constantly and actively interacts with the past for the purpose of constructing the future. It is often considered as a symbol that expresses a normative guide to development, by prescribing retrieval of bygone models of excellence that may be of relevance to present or future needs.

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