



## History education in Ghana: a pragmatic tradition of change and continuity

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### ABSTRACT

History education in Ghana has been situated within the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial trajectories and debates. Whereas there is a conscious effort by history teacher associations, academics and other interest groups to advance and develop the teaching of the subject at different levels of the educational system in Ghana, little attention has been paid to how the textbooks have conceptualised the cultural, ethnic and indigenous histories with their attendant differences and how they have affected or complicated narratives in the postcolonial setting of Ghana. Essentially, this contribution highlights how historical themes on empire, colonisation, decolonisation and the Commonwealth, and associated events, are explored in historiography and in the curricula of Ghana. This involves an examination of the dynamic relationship between political traditions, curriculum, historiography, and scholarship at university level. Overall, the paper highlights the political contexts that have shaped the various stages and manifestations of the history curriculum as it concerns British influence, decolonisation, independence and postcolonialism in Ghana before, during and after the development of the Nkrumahist and Danquah-Busia traditions.

### KEYWORDS

African historiography, Achimota model of education, Nkrumahist and Danquah-Busia traditions, Contemporary issues, History education, Ghana

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## Introduction

E.H. Carr defined history as “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the past and present” (Carr, 1961, p. 3). The context and content of what constitutes African history has always been a source of controversy between Africans and Europeans, historians, philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists among others. The writing and studying of African history have been on a dynamic journey.

Postcolonial scholars and governments have tried to return Ghanaians to their roots – an initiative known in Ghana as *Sankofa*. This *Sankofa* drive has influenced scholars and statesmen to implement measures and embark on projects that seek to elevate Ghanaian history and inculcate in the younger generation a sense of belonging and national pride. There have been some challenges in achieving this objective because History has not always been a compulsory subject at most levels of Ghanaian education; at Junior Secondary level since 2007 it has been integrated with subjects such as Citizenship Education, Social Studies, Religious and Moral Education (RME) and Christian Religious Studies (CRS).

However, since the election of a new government in 2017, in Ghana’s current education system History as a subject appears richly and fully in the primary curriculum, from Basic 1 to Basic 6 (NaCCE, 2019). In these earlier years of schooling there will now be an opportunity to teach thoroughly the chronological and substantive structure of Ghana’s pre-colonial, colonial history and events immediately after independence. Although it might seem to have some of the shortcomings of a nationalistic canon, the fact that it adopts enquiry routes and makes considerable cognitive demands on younger students, places the structure in a category which the Australian historian John Hirst (2016), advising against a mere canon of events for a national curriculum, described as “landmarks, but with questions.” There is now a shift in focus from worship of traditional Gold Coast or Ghanaian heroes to a contextualisation of the role of significant figures like J.B. Danquah, Nkrumah, and other members of the so-called ‘Big Six’ who achieved mythic status as a result of events on 28 February 1948 which led to the Accra riots. That key event itself, including the lead-up to it and its consequences, is subject to evidence-based scrutiny. In this new curriculum, the role of women is stressed, and space is given to the study of high achievers, men and women, across all walks of national life (e.g. in the economy, diplomacy, sport, technology). Across the shorter junior secondary phase, history appears within the still extant 2007 Social Studies Syllabus but is linked to an understanding of citizenship, social justice and politics. History is an elective subject at senior secondary level (i.e. not compulsory for all) and is examined within a West African examination framework alongside similar syllabuses for Nigeria, Liberia and The Gambia.

For many years there was an absence of a bridging narrative connecting the past with the present in debates about history education in Africa – and Ghana in particular. Admittedly, some scholars have attempted to bridge the gap by tracing the historical context of education in Ghana from the colonial epoch through to the postcolonial era. Examples of such contributions include Foster’s (1965) *Education and social change in Ghana*, Peterson del Mar’s (2012) *A pragmatic tradition: The past in Ghanaian education*, and Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh, and Addo’s (2016) *Educational reforms in Ghana: Past and present*. In addition, works by Zachernuk (1998), Saphir (2001) and Coe (2002) have analysed colonial history education to assess ways that knowledge and culture were managed during colonial rule, and explored how historical literature and anthropology were fashioned to justify and promote the imperial agenda. These texts indicated that although there were conscious efforts to inculcate history in the people, the agenda fitted a dominant view at the time of European superiority. The existing literature barely explores the twenty-first century dissemination of historical knowledge. The current article seeks to fill the gap by considering the contemporary issues affecting history education in Ghana. Overall, the paper highlights the political contexts that have shaped the teaching of history as it concerns British influence, decolonisation, independence and postcolonialism in Ghana before, during and after the development of the Nkrumahist and Danquah-Busia traditions.

## Major changes from colonial to postcolonial historiography

A key feature of the patronising attitude of some European and British writers can be identified as a denial that African history even existed before the arrival of Europeans (Hegel, 1956; Newton, 1940; Trevor-Roper, 1963). This attitude has been challenged and commented on by later writers (Kiwanuka, 1973; Keita, 1974; Mazrui, 1982; Fugelstad, 1992; Kuykedal, 1993; Boubia, 1997; Zackernuk, 1998; Babacar, 2005; and Aissat & Djafri, 2017).

As Boahen (1966), Ellis (2002), Philips (2005) and Afolayan (2012) have shown, African historiography has gone through several stages at different periods spanning from medieval to post-medieval periods. Ancient and classical writers wrote about Africa but their works were not regarded as systematic. Islamic and Arabic writers followed suit, and left first- and second-hand accounts of African states. The next phase in the development of African history witnessed the writings of European traders, travellers, missionaries and other adventurers whose accounts about Africa represented an era of colonial historiography. The last phase of African historiography saw nationalists and liberationists of African descent who sought to restore autonomy, authenticity and reverence to the African past. In this paper, it is mainly the latter phase in the development of African historiography that is considered.

The quest to refute European conceptions about the African past compelled a group of African nationalists to write from an African perspective. African scholars and Africanists in opposition asserted the existence of an African history. According to Mazrui (1982), in December 1962, Nkrumah noted in his opening address to the First International Congress of African Studies that:

The central myth in the mythology surrounding Africa is the denial that we are a historical people. It is said that, whereas other continents have shaped history and determined its course, Africa has stood still, held down by inertia. Africa, it is said, entered history only as a result of European contact. Its history, therefore, is widely felt to be an extension of European history. (Mazrui, 1982, p.16)

A Nigerian, K. Onwuka Dike (1917-1983) was the first to break the ice concerning the use of 'unconventional sources especially oral evidence' as part of the scholarly work for his PhD, later published (Dike, 1951; 1956). This shift marked an important milestone in the development of African historiography as it provided the impetus for change from a focus of African history which centred on the European activities in Africa to what Africans themselves had achieved. Dike also highlighted that European languages were not the only written languages used in writing African history. Many of the people of sub-Saharan Africa for several centuries used Arabic, Swahili and Hausa as official and literary languages for many different types of written correspondence (cited in Mazrui, 1982, p. 312). This was meant to show the varied evidence of African history – which most Europeans ignored or refused to acknowledge. J. D. Fage (1921-2002), clearly influenced by Dike, in his 1964 professorial inaugural at the University of Birmingham on 'African History for the Outside World', insisted that African history had many examples of 'purposive movement' and did not belong to the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous people (Mazrui, 1982, p. 312).

Against this background, there were individual and collective efforts at retelling Africa's past by individuals such as C. C. Reindorf (1834-1917), J. M. Sarbah (1864-1910), Joseph Boakye Danquah (1895-1965), Casely Hayford (1866-1930), Kobina Sekyi (author of the satirical play, *The Blinkards*, 1915) and Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972). Their efforts manifested in creative works, essays, articles, and to some extent their own lifestyles, a challenge to – and rejection of – all aspects of European cultural imperialism. Danquah's *Akan Doctrine of God* (1944) was based on Akan culture and tradition, allowing him to use a locality known to him to propagate the advancement of African civilisation especially through African-based institutions and conventions (Danquah, 1944, pp. 1-10).

### ***The Achimota tradition***

A practical application of the Phelps Stokes Commission report (1925) was the curriculum created for the newly established Achimota (originally named Prince of Wales College and School, Achimota, later Achimota College, nicknamed Motown) in Accra, which was a major experiment in bi-cultural education. History specialists were required to conduct investigations into traditional sources and develop curricula based on the African experience. Therefore, the educators were conscious of the necessity for European elements in the curriculum to be mixed with a background of African history. Students were encouraged to conduct their own investigations into native customs and folklore. Ultimately, Achimota was to produce students who were Western in their intellectual attitudes towards life, with a respect for science and capacity for systematic thought, but who remained African in sympathy and desirous of preserving and developing what they viewed as deserving of respect in ethnic life, custom, rule and law (Coe, 2002, p. 29).

In 1925, A. G. Fraser, the principal of Achimota College argued that history education was about training true leaders. He noted that:

Schools cannot nationalise the African. We cannot re-make the African in his own image. But we can try to see that he understands the new factors that are coming into his country so rapidly, the meaning of changes that they are effecting, and the nature of the traditional laws, customs and lore threatened. We can show him parallels elsewhere and help him to study them and think on them. We can get him keenly interested in and thinking over the life of his village. But the adaptation of the new to the old, the synthesis, we must leave him to make ... Our task is not to give rules and lay down lines and make moulds, but to develop the powers of insight and initiative of our pupils, to get them to try to ask questions, and to try and suggest further thinking. (Fraser, cited in Zachernuk, 1998, p. 489)

Indirectly, Fraser argued for the exposure of Africans to all knowledge systems, both foreign and local so that they could critically apply them to their immediate environment and local conditions.

In 1927, when Governor Guggisberg founded Achimota College, there was interest in the development of an African curriculum and this caused the College to give precedence to the study of African languages and culture. Botwe-Asamoah noted that behind these commendable efforts was a deliberate attempt to:

... produce a type of student, who is Western in his intellectual attitude towards life, with respect for science and capacity for systematic thought, but who remains African in sympathy and desirous in preserving and developing what is deserving of respect in tribal life, customs, rule and law. (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005, p. 142)

A key contributor in the development of the history syllabus in Ghana was W. E. F. Ward, who taught at Achimota. His textbooks would remain influential long after independence. Ward's aim was "to teach young Africans to understand and appreciate Africa's past and to foster a true pride of race," therefore young children should begin their study of history by learning about their own home district, and in the faith that ideally history is to be taught as scientifically in Africa as in Europe (Zachernuk, 1998, p. 489). Although Ward's view about wanting history lessons to impart moral values by teaching about 'the great men of the past', has now been challenged on the grounds of inclusion, egalitarianism and social justice, his wish to train the 'historic sense' is still relevant. Ward's 1934 primary school text, *Africa before the white man came*, included ancient Egypt and the great Sudanese empires and created a link between North Africa and West Africa. It mapped and described at least twenty-one independent African states before 1800. He attributed African backwardness to the Atlantic and Oriental slave trades.

The sequel examined by Zachernuk (1998, p. 489) and Coe (2002, p. 31) focused more on European actions. Others assisted in the cultivation of African arts and crafts, dress, traditions,

customs, and traditional drumming. In order to achieve this vision, the subjects taught included: History, Southern Languages (Ewe, Fante, Ga, and Twi), Agriculture, Art, Music and Games, Native Folk-stories, Local History and Customs. In the history curriculum taught by Ward, the first two years of history included Gold Coast history and modern European history, while the last two years concentrated on the growth of the British Empire. He saw the need to learn about local history before moving on to world history. Despite this vision, a great part of the education provided consisted of the transmission of European culture – art, music, drama, literature – to African students (Coe, 2002, pp. 30-31).

Although this represented a great achievement in historical education, the challenges remained considerable. For instance, by 1927, most of the staff were Europeans and tried to inculcate African customs into the African though they learned African customs and languages one and half years before the commencement of the school. There were only two African staff. Notable among them was Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey. After his death, there was no one to push for the African agenda. In 1930, there was a drive to Africanise the staff, yet those who were sent to Britain for training returned and did not necessarily go back into teaching but rather diverted into other fields, such as the civil service (Coe, 2002).

To fill this gap, Africans were eventually occasionally brought in to help train the students. Chiefs and other prominent Africans gave lectures on local histories, folklore and customs. However, these were brought in as junior or part-time staff. Sadly, these supplementary African staff were not experts at teaching in the formal way as expected at Achimota – as they were knowledgeable in demonstrating rather than teaching. In addition, most of these African music and dance histories were taught as extra-curricular activities rather than actual subjects worthy of attention. The African elements of the curriculum were less evident as the school progressed, to the extent that, by the end of the colonial period, its curriculum was virtually the same as the others on the African Gold Coast, and indeed in England (Coe, 2002, p. 33).

Ironically, the African elites opposed the concept of Africanisation of the curriculum as proposed by the Europeans, and this is apparent in an earlier Legislative Council debate (April 1921, cited in Kimble, 1963). Nana Ofori Atta (1881-1943) considered it unwise to restrict studies to the African scene while Casely-Hayford (1866-1930) considered it a dangerous policy. The latter advocated that Achimota should concentrate on secondary education as commonly understood which included Classics as a compulsory part of the curriculum. In 1935, political nationalists attacked the way Ward taught African history in an attempt to reveal that the school was an imperial institution. They also criticised the lack of senior African staff at the school. Another angle of attack came from African Christians who disliked the practice of forcing converts to participate in what they saw as ‘pagan’ practices such as drumming and dancing, as they were suspicious of the school’s non-denominationalism (Coe, 2002).

### ***The origins of the Danquah-Busia and Nkrumahist traditions***

The personalities and events examined here in relation to Ghana’s history education are interwoven and interrelated. In many ways the lives of the key players in Ghana’s postcolonial political story reflect a strong interest in education, and their different contributions to Ghana’s legacy can be explored in school history education today. Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972), was originally ‘leader of government business’ (1951-1952) before becoming Prime Minister of the Gold Coast (1952-1957). He was also Ghana’s first Prime Minister (1957-1960) and Ghana’s first President (1960-1966). He had played a leading role in the campaign for independence and in the Pan-African movement. He was also instrumental in the establishment of the University of Ghana out of the University College of the Gold Coast.

Kofi Abrefa Busia (1913-1978) mixed an academic career pursued in several places (at Oxford, back in the colonial Gold Coast and subsequently in the Netherlands at Leiden while in political exile) with a political one. This for Busia was first as a colonial district commissioner (1942-1949), as a member of the Legislative Council (from 1951), then as a leader representing the opposition until he left Ghana in 1959, eventually returning in 1966 (after the downfall of Nkrumah) to

become prime minister 1969-1972 under the Presidency of Edward Akufo-Addo (father of Ghana's current Head of State), and one of the original 'Big Six', followed by yet another – but final – period in exile.

Similarly, the life-story of J.B. Danquah (1895-1965) demonstrates a fusion of political and academic aspirations and achievements. In Danquah's case his career in politics consisted of founding a political party (the United Gold Coast Convention), which after Nkrumah's CPP broke away from it, became one of opposition rather than government. Both Busia and Danquah would publish significant work, in Danquah's case a classic, *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944), which sought to reconcile aspects of Christianity with Akan traditional beliefs. Each was interested in building bridges between Northern-Western, European-British traditions and African ones, especially in the areas of religion, morality, philosophy, political structures, culture and literacy, but importantly both brought rigour to their studies of African history and culture. Danquah's work on the Akan is now studied in Basic 1 in the 2019 primary history curriculum: "Discuss the role of Dr J.B. Danquah in linking the civilisations of the ancient Ghana Empire to the Akan of the forest region of Ghana." (History of Ghana Curriculum for Primary Schools, Basic 1, 2019, p4) His later campaigning is studied in a Basic 5 (primary) unit: "Examine sources of evidence about the role of Dr Joseph Boakye Danquah in the Gold Coast Youth Conference." History of Ghana Curriculum for Primary Schools, Basic 5, 2019, p 37)

Also linked to an Akan heritage, Nkrumah could identify in some ways too with these lines of thought. His major interest, that of achieving Ghanaian independence was driven by his energetic activist Pan-Africanism, fuelled by left-wing socialist and even Marxist radical egalitarian ideals, but also by American civil rights aspirations. Over Nkrumah's years at the centre of administration of the Gold Coast including Ghana's independence and newly founded republican status government (1951-1966), his nationalism and philosophy would be accompanied by adherence to an increasingly authoritarian style. Nevertheless, the fact that Ghana would be the fourth former colonial jurisdiction (after India, Pakistan and Ceylon) to gain independence from Britain says much for Nkrumah's commitment and energy.

With the others, evidence of this bridging process between the traditional and the modern can be seen in Busia's University of Oxford DPhil thesis of 1947, subsequently published in 1951, 'The position of the chief in the modern political system of Ashanti: A study of the influence of contemporary social changes on Ashanti political institutions'; and in Danquah's 1928 work *Gold Coast: Akan laws and customs and the Akim Abuakwa Constitution*. Danquah had worked with Nkrumah, drawing on pre-colonial history to find a suitable name for the new jurisdiction, that is Ghana. Already trained as a teacher, with experience in the Gold Coast, Nkrumah went to the USA. While first at Lincoln University and then at the Ivy League University of Pennsylvania, he gained two master's degrees, one in Philosophy, the other in Education. He worked with the American linguist William Everett Welmers, providing the spoken material that formed the basis of the first descriptive grammar of the Fante dialect of the Akan language.

Despite their common interests and originally shared political party, later, both Joseph Boakye Danquah and Kofi Abrefa Busia would fall foul of Nkrumah. Danquah stood against Nkrumah in the 1960 presidential election. No stranger to prison as he had been detained, indeed with Nkrumah himself, from 12 March 1948 for a month after the Accra riots, Danquah was arrested then detained from 3 October 1961 to 22 June 1962; and again, from 8 January 1964, dying in custody of a heart attack, aged 69, on 4 February 1965. Significantly, in 1964 Ghana had been declared a one-party state with Nkrumah president-for-life. However, this was not to be for long, as a military coup would oust Nkrumah on 24 February 1966. He lived in exile until his death in 1972. Danquah was given a national funeral after February 1966 and his status was restored. While in exile, although published after the fall of Nkrumah, Busia would write a strong condemnation of Nkrumah's style of government in his *Africa in search of democracy* (1967).

### **Key events leading to Ghana's independence: The origin of the 'Big Six' tradition**

Dr J.B. Danquah had founded the UGCC in 1947, and it was taken forward by businessman-merchant George 'Paa' Grant, Nkrumah himself, and four other members of the 'Big Six' group (Ebenezer Ako-Adjei, Edward Akufo-Addo, Emmanuel Obetsebi-Lampsey, and William Ofori Atta). There was move to boycott goods imported from Lebanon/Syria and Europe, mainly because of the high prices being asked for them in shops. Another economic factor was the spread of 'swollen shoot', a plant virus affecting the cocoa crop. But a significant example of UGCC activism, and a reminder of protests elsewhere in the British Empire, was their support of veterans of World War Two who were not receiving expected post-war benefits, and a demonstration about this perceived example of injustice at this time of inflation took place outside the Governor's residence at Christiansborg Castle in Accra on 28 February 1948. This led to the shooting of three unarmed ex-soldiers (formerly of the Gold Coast Regiment) by Police Superintendent Colin Imray, his own men having not reacted to his order to open fire. Imray was interviewed about this and the rest of his career in the colonial police by the Imperial War Museum in 1992, the data amounting to 15 reels of film recording (IWM, 1992).

These events led to the Watson Commission (reporting soon after the events, in June 1948) and the Coussey Committee Report (the committee having been established in March 1949) recommending a more inclusive Legislative Assembly under a new constitution. Nkrumah, at odds with the UGCC, described the constitutional proposals as "fraudulent and bogus", forming a break-away party, the Convention People's Party (CPP) in June 1949. The motto of the CPP was "Self-Government, Now", and the CPP adopted a policy of positive action (e.g. strikes) rather than take the constitutional course planned by the new Governor, Charles Arden-Clarke, whose own account was published (1958). Nkrumah would be arrested and only released from prison after the CPP won a majority of seats in the 1951 election. It is worth noting that these events, the commission, committee and report are now studied in Basic 5 and Basic 6 in the 2019 primary history curriculum.

### **Nkrumah's interventions with education at school and university level (1957-1966)**

After independence, there was an urgent need to Africanise the content of History education in Ghana. To combat the Eurocentric nature of the educational system in Ghana, Nkrumah's government took over from the missionaries the full responsibility for Ghana's educational policy and practice. The government created an *Accelerated Development Plan for Education* to carry out its policies. Nkrumah also halted the expansion of missionary schools. However, Botwe-Asamoah (2005) notes that there was no mention of changes in the content of the courses taught to the African students. The government policy was simply an administrative change in terms of material, financial and human resources. Nkrumah's priority in his educational policy was the kind of mass education and adult education designed to enable everyone to become literate. In addition, he believed that the class periods set aside for civics in the schools, which included the study of African history and traditions were, on their own, insufficient to combat centuries of British cultural hegemony in Ghana. Thus, History education after independence (1957) experienced little change in the curriculum. A letter from the Principal Officer of Education to the Minister of Education (29 July, 1957) revealed that the curriculum in the middle school was still based on textbooks by European authors.

In August 1957, several concerns were raised concerning this Syllabus. It was argued that there was insufficient attention paid to West African history with its great ancient empires like the Ghana, Mali, and Songhai Empires but rather focused on European history, remote kings like Louis XIV, or great travellers like Marco Polo instead of Ibn Battuta who contributed so much to West African history. Even with the history of the country, Ward's focus was on the nineteenth-century wars between Asante and the coastal states and interactions with the Europeans on the coast, neglecting the histories of other ethnic groups.

A new Syllabus was drawn up in 1958. It included topics such as the Roman Empire, Christianity, the spread of Islam, Barbarian invasions, Arab influence in Africa, the early history of West Africa including the Mali, Ghana and Songhai Empires, the famous traveller Ibn Battuta, Chinese civilisation, early voyages, the coming of the Europeans into Africa, early history of the Akan, Ewe and Ga, the early civilisation of Egypt, Jews, Iraq, Cretans, Phoenicians, the Indo-European (Aryan) people, Greeks, Persians, and Alexander the Great.

Nkrumah attempted at this time to effect changes in the University's curriculum but met stiff resistance from the faculty and staff who saw it as an infringement on their academic freedom (Ashby 1964, cited in Botwe-Asamoah, 2005). They even tried to prevent Nkrumah from entering the University without authorisation but in reaction Nkrumah stated, "a university must relate its activities to the needs of the society in which it exists" (Ashby, 1964, p.87). Nkrumah's motivation to intervene and reform the University was met with protests not only within the college but also, from all over the world.

Once Ghana gained fully-fledged independence by becoming a republic in 1960, Nkrumah worked on liberating the University of Ghana from what he saw as the grip of imperialists. In May, 1961, a memorandum from Nkrumah to the University stated that "all appointments of members of the academic staff [would] automatically be terminated" (Finlay, 1968, p. 57) when the association with the former degree-awarding body, the University of London, ended. He further indicated that persons would be appointed without re-applying, but it might "be necessary to terminate certain appointments and to revise the conditions of service of others" (Ashby, 1964 cited in Finlay, 1968, p. 57). In his first University address as a chancellor, Nkrumah emphasised that colonial ideas and practices would not be tolerated and that a major task of the universities would be to further "complete mental emancipation and the education of the miseducated [so] that we can achieve ... rapid transformation" (cited in Finlay, 1968, p. 150; and in Botwe-Asamoah, 2005, p. 150).

Scholars have argued that Nkrumah initiated meaningful changes in his quest to Africanise education in general – with emphasis on History education. However, this ideology was misguided. He sought to use his political sentiments to position himself as a power centre from which all course content emanated. According to Finlay (1968), the fear of the Prevention Detention Act kept faculty members silent. Measures implemented to ensure compliance included embedding Party corps leaders within the university, establishing Convention People's Party (CPP) student publications, demanding that all commencing students take a two-week orientation course at the Ideological Institute, reviewing all scholarships annually on the basis of good performance and good conduct, and reconstituting the CPP branches in the universities. An Inspection Committee was appointed to survey all bookshops and libraries, review their book orders, check their holdings and remove publications, which did not reflect the party's ideology (Finlay 1968).

## **Social studies from 1987 and drives towards curriculum reform from 2017**

In 1987, the Ministry of Education and Culture under Mohammed Ben Abdallah noted and proposed that the nation's curricula should:

inculcate in every child an awareness of history and traditional custom [and should] provide Ghanaians with a sense of cultural dignity and identity so that they can . . . free their minds from dependency on the cultures of other people.  
(cited in Peterson del Mar, 2012, p. 27)

A series of initiatives by the USA and Britain such as the African Summer study 1961, the Oxford Conference of 1967, the Social Studies Mombasa Conference of 1968, the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) of 1969, and the 1987 Evans-Anfom Reforms by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) resulted in making Social Studies a core subject. It recommended the combination of the separate subjects of Geography, History and Civics as a single subject (Boadu, n.d.). Compulsory History at the middle level was replaced with Social Studies because the

curricula of Social Studies was meant to be an interdisciplinary subject which encompassed History, Geography, Economics and Government. It emphasised the holistic integration of nation-building content around relevant issues and topics that included environmental concerns, population, attention to attitudes, values, beliefs and the skills of problem solving (Yalley 2017, p. 101). However, the content of history in the Social Studies curricula was relatively negligible and inconsequential to meet the goal of strengthening the sense of patriotism and national unity. This view was supported by Dwomoh (2018, p. 5) who argued that the light-touch history content in the current Social Studies curriculum (2007) may fade away if care was not taken, although his comments have to be set against the 2017-2019 changes in the primary curriculum (Basic 1 to Basic 6) where history content is considerable.

Peterson del Mar (2012) first questioned why, despite efforts by historians and government to return Africans to their cultural roots, the textbooks in schools appeared to criticise colonial customs while eulogising colonial achievements. He also identified efforts made by the writers of Ghanaian Social Studies and History textbooks to superimpose national identity over cultural identity. In *Social Studies for Senior High Schools*, Boateng (2009) noted that the tendency to identify more with one's ethnicity than with a nation hampers national integration and development. She argued that ethnicity can be dangerous for a nation because it can not only bring conflict, warfare, nepotism, and divisive, ethnic-based politics, but in addition obstruct national integration. Boateng further noted that ethnic music and dance vary greatly from group to group but 'highlife' music and patriotic songs cut across ethnic lines and can make people forget about their affiliation and think of national objectives. She emphasised the need for measures to promote national identity including a common language, which cuts across ethnic lines, and instruction in Ghana's multiple cultures (Boateng, 2009, pp. 28-29). According to Peterson del Mar (2012, pp. 28-29), *Sankofa*, is as much a process of removing "outmoded customs as of preserving those parts of our cultural heritage that are relevant and valuable to the solution of our society's problems and national development." Peterson del Mar (2012) described Ghanaian textbooks as didactic and prescriptive because they embodied a pedagogy that emphasised the mastery of facts over the exploration of dynamic and open-ended processes. He further highlighted that the books were meant for only one purpose, to meet the requirement of the GES (Senior High) syllabus in order to prepare the students for examination.

Peterson del Mar (2012) continued the critique of textbooks' treatment of Ghanaian history and culture and argued that their approach was seen as much more pragmatic than romantic, more conservative than inspiring. Unlike many other accounts, the textbooks did not address uncomfortable subjects such as slavery and female genital mutilation, and their treatment of colonisation was relatively sympathetic. The British were credited with unifying, modernising, and undertaking a civilising mission in Ghana. Traditions that did not serve the interests of unity and progress were presented largely so that they could be dismissed. As a result, there is much to confirm a continuation of a situation described by Massialas in 1975 that the curriculum materials used in schools were not consistent with the social and political systems of Ghana.

As part of the Social Studies syllabus for junior high schools (2007), the Ghana Education Service Syllabus looks at the history of states before colonisation. It discusses migration of ethnic groups into the area now known as Ghana: the traditional homes of the major ethnic groups, reasons for migration, effects of migration on ethnicity, thus justifying the cosmopolitan nature of Ghana; the arrival of Europeans; looking at the reasons why Europeans came to the Gold Coast, methods of trading, missionary work of early Europeans, establishment of schools, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, British colonisation, major political events that led to the independence etc.; cultural expressions in Ghana through marriage, festivals among others (Boateng, 2009; Ibrahim, 2014; Akadi, 2015). At junior secondary level, every student undertakes Social Studies as a compulsory subject which contains elements of history. Beyond that, History is an elective subject and 'Government' as a course also contains elements of history.

After the 1987 changes, and in the 2007 version of Social Studies, the government integrated History as part of the study of Citizenship and Social Studies. It must be noted the content in at least one of the textbooks associated with this course is inconsistent with Ghanaian literature

written by advanced scholars. This highlights the importance of allowing university scholars to have a stronger voice in the control of the production of knowledge. In their textbooks, Ibrahim (2014) and Akadi (2015) enumerated the repercussions of colonial rule on Africa and listed more positive effects than negatives. They include the introduction of formal education by opening schools and colleges, provision of infrastructure, plantation farming, architectural development, machines, common currency, establishment of peace, law and order, bringing all ethnic groups together to form nations, the ending of the slave trade, the development of international trade, common language, cultural enrichment and reduction of ethnic conflict (Ibrahim, 2014, pp. 55-66; Akadi, 2015, p. 38). However, Akadi in chapter three of his work captured the title *Ghana as a Nation* with a subsection on 'History of Ghana from 4th to 13th century', causing confusion by creating the notion of the existence of a nation before colonial rule. Most of the textbooks project an allegiance to the state above ethnic loyalty and neglect to stress the fact that allegiance to an ethnic group not only progressed to allegiance to the state but that the two allegiances are not necessarily incompatible (Akadi, 2015).

The latest change to History education is the effort made from 2017 by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) to start a process which will eventually include a history curriculum for all three stages of education: primary, middle and secondary. This is unprecedented because History has remained an optional subject since the 1987 educational reforms. This new primary curriculum focuses mostly on pre-independence events with only a little extension into post-independence Ghana, although the age of the students' needs to be borne in mind (NaCCA, Ministry of Education, *History of Ghana Curriculum for Primary Schools [Basic 1-6]*, 2019).

### **From the tradition of a single founder to a more pluralistic tradition**

From independence to the present, there has always been contention about whether or not Ghana has a founder or founders. After Ghana became a republic in 1960, Nkrumah sought to place himself at the centre of the narrative of both teaching and learning within the universities by setting the pace for the Africanisation of African history. This, in the long run, has affected views relating to Ghana's foundations. Nkrumah purported to be the founder of Ghana's independence without any recourse to his previous political allies and later opponents such as the other members of the 'Big Six' whose influence and platform led to his emergence on the political scene. On the other hand, the Danquah-Busia traditions are associated with two political parties which flourished in the 1957-1966 period at the crucial time of independence. These are the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) and the United Party (UP), and their existence shows that another political tradition existed as well as Nkrumah's Convention People's Party, so Nkrumah cannot be regarded as the sole founder of Ghana, for without the political platform provided by the UGCC, he could not have mobilised the nationalists to fight for independence. Lentz (2017, p. 252) notes that Nkrumah's opponents saw his attempt to erect his statue, coins and stamp as a presumptuous gesture of self-aggrandisement and self-stylisation in national paraphernalia.

Scholarship in Ghana's history succinctly treats national independence periodically and thematically according to the role each person or party has played. To illustrate with a few works, Adu-Boahen (1975), Buah (1998), Grocking (2005), Amenumey (2008), look at a range of early nationalist groups such as the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, the National Congress of British West Africa, the West African Student Union, the Gold Coast Youth Conference as well as post-Second World War political parties such as the United Gold Coast Convention, Convention People's Party, National Liberation Movements, Northern Peoples Party, Togoland Congress among others. Each group played its part in the attainment of self-government and subsequently independence, and demonstrated that political pluralism in working towards this aim was possible. In Nkrumah's defence, Adu-Boahen (1975, pp. 155-162) argues, among other things, that without the emergence of Kwame Nkrumah as the secretary within the party, it would have remained an essentially elitist and bourgeoisie urban party. Nkrumah's youthful exuberance,

Marxist and communist orientation and pan-Africanism outlook greatly accelerated the UGCC into a mass-based party.

Similarly, Amenumey (2008) analyses the formation of the UGCC by the conservative and moderate political elite such as those who became members of the 'Big Six' group (J. B. Danquah, Obetsebi Lamptey, E. A. W. Ofori Atta, Edward Akufo-Addo, Ako Adjei) and, in addition George Grant, R. S. Blay, R. A. Awoonor Williams, and J. W. de Graft Johnson. Since they could not dedicate themselves fully to the tasks of political struggle, Ako Adjei recommended the services of Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah in 1949 broke away to form the CPP due to ideological and methodological differences. Through his aggressive stance, independence was won (Amenumey 2008).

Gocking (2005) also emphasises the role of Nkrumah and the CPP in the fight for independence. Though he analyses the UGCC as part of the nationalistic groups that were formed after the Second World War, he dedicates a chapter to the CPP and its leadership role in the independence struggle without doing the same for the UGCC. He presents the UGCC as a conservative group that sought to replace chiefs on the Legislative Council and received the blame for the 1948 riot by Governor Gerald Creasy. Nkrumah on the other hand is presented as the actual figure solidly behind Ghana's quest for independence.

In capturing concepts of nationalism and the fight for independence, F. K. Buah (1998) lumps the formation of organisations such as the Association of West African Merchants (AWAM), the 1948 boycott of (Chief) Nii Kwabena Bonne, and the UGCC together as associations formed out of the frustration of the Gold Coast merchants. Buah and Gocking present Nkrumah as a nationalist and pan-Africanist whose passion about Africa attracted the attention of the intelligentsia because they themselves were too busy and conservative for the fight for independence. Therefore, Nkrumah's personality and charisma, his ability to draw in Ghanaian youth and workers was what won him popularity and eventually led to independence (Buah 1998, pp. 152-153; Gocking 2005, p. 91). Therefore, these works acknowledge the existence of a political culture and personalities before the emergence of Nkrumah. However, their objective was not one which sought for immediate independence as did Nkrumah. These works mentioned above have remained very influential in the teaching and learning of history in Ghana. They help to explain why Nkrumah has remained a central figure in the narrative of Ghana's history.

This contested set of traditions has been inherited by the two dominant parties in contemporary Ghana, the NPP (New Patriotic Party, now associated with the Danquah-Busia tradition) (Nkrumah's opponents) and the NDC (National Democratic Congress, Nkrumah's proponents). When ex-President Mills declared 21 September as Founder's Day in 2009, there was opposition from the main opposition party, the NPP. In 2017, on assuming office, President Akufo Addo quickly effected changes to fit his party's philosophy that Ghana does not have just one founder. The 21 September public holiday was re-named Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Day, and 4 August was declared Founders' Day. This has popularly been tagged as the 'power of the apostrophe' by several scholars including Elizabeth Ohene who notes how a national debate can erupt as a result of an apostrophe (Ohene, 2019).

In order to reverse what they consider as the Nkrumah-centred historical narrative, the NPP government in their *History of Ghana Curriculum for Primary Schools (Basic 1-6)* (NaCCA, Ministry of Education, 2019) has initiated the process of not only making history compulsory but also, as has been seen, the inclusion of all pioneers and contemporary personalities who have contributed to Ghana's independence. Included in the Syllabus is the formation of the UGCC and CPP as well as the contribution of these two parties towards the independence of Ghana. All of the 'Big Six' names are studied to teach their individual and collective roles in the independence struggle. The uniqueness of this curriculum is that it does not only focus on political leadership but makes efforts to include personalities who, from independence to the present, have contributed diversely to Ghana's development. The following personalities and their contributions are studied:

**Basic 1**

Theodosia Okoh – National flag  
 Amon Kotei – Coat of Arms  
 Baba Yara – Football for Ghana  
 Ephraim Amu – Music  
 Kofi Antubam – Art and craft  
 Kow Ansah – Film  
 Mrs Charity Zormelo-Fiawoo – first woman university graduate  
 Squadron Leader Melody Danquah – First female pilot  
 Elizabeth Ohene – First female editor of a national newspaper (Daily Graphic)  
 Justice Georgina Wood – First female Chief Justice (and)  
 Justice Joyce Bamford-Addo – First female Speaker of Parliament

**Basic 3**

George Grant – Businessman  
 Winifred Tete-Ansa, Esther Ocloo – Nkulenu Industries  
 B.A. Mensah – Pioneer Tobacco Ltd.  
 Kwabena Pepra – Paramount Distilleries  
 J.K. Siaw – Tata Brewery  
 Alhaji Adam Iddrisu – Global Haulage

**Basic 5**

Dr R.E.G Armattoo – Science and Medicine  
 Kofi Annan – international diplomacy  
 Osibisa – popular music  
 El Anatsui – sculptor  
 David Adjaye – Architect  
 Ozwald Boateng – fashion  
 Efua Sutherland – playwright  
 Prof Francis Allotey – science and History  
 Prof Akua Kuenyehia – law  
 Prof. Frimpong Boateng – Surgeon  
 Abedi Ayew 'Pele' – Football  
 Azumah Nelson –Boxing

Table 1: Personalities who from independence to the present  
 have contributed diversely to Ghana's development

Source: NaCCA, Ministry of Education,  
 History of Ghana Curriculum for Primary Schools (Basic 1-6), 2019, pp. 2-46

## Conclusions

Knowledge production and the associated process of its dissemination are key ingredients to the success of society, and the wielders of powers will always want to determine what kind of knowledge this is, and how it is produced. It is supposed to be objective, an independent venture devoid of political interference, yet the teaching and production of historical knowledge in schools and universities have always been subject to political influences. Different epochs in history affect differently how history is written and studied. The colonial Eurocentric perception of the backwardness of Africa affected the production of historical knowledge as history education glorified Europe at the expense of Africa. Immediately after independence, there were efforts by both legitimate and military juntas to determine what is produced as history. These governments have sought to influence history to make it fit their own agendas. This explains why the dominant political traditions in Ghana: the Nkrumahist and the Danquah-Busia traditions have featured prominently in the production and study of historical narratives. The two main competing political ideologies have sought to use political power to influence how history is written and studied (see Armah, 2019; and Lartey, 2019). Another key element of history production is the

subtle divorce between historical scholarship and what is produced in the textbooks as history. While Ghanaian history scholars have written to decolonise scholarship, this is not reflected in the textbooks produced for primary schools, nor for junior and senior high schools.

Arising from the literature published within the colonial and postcolonial eras, it is possible to assert that the first university in Ghana and the universities and colleges, which emerged from the 1920s, produced African scholars who pushed forward the production or development of a new approach to writing and the production of African history in Africa and Ghana in particular. The debate continued into the post-independence era, and this included the spectacle of the new African government, specifically Nkrumah, seeking to infiltrate the ranks of the university. The indigenisation of systems and knowledge was promoted and Africans' participation in the training of their own kind necessitated the expansion of new ideas concerning Africa's and Ghana's intellectual epiphany, which would gradually erode and further challenge the Eurocentric status quo.

The closest possible solution to permit the curriculum to be politically neutral lies within the domain of intellectuals from Ghana's universities who are not politically tainted. When such a class of intellectuals produce historical documents or design a syllabus, which has been subjected to appropriate intellectual scrutiny or critique, it stands to pass the test of what we refer to as proper historiography. It is also crucial to emphasise that the content of the history books is as vital as the syllabus/curriculum designed to teach history in Ghana.

Finally, it is necessary to summarise how the debate has evolved. Initially it focused on a contrast between A.G. Fraser's call for the training of Africans where they would embrace dual cultures – African and the global arena, including Europe – as against the model espoused by Ward and others. The latter group's paradigm of history education was anchored in forms of teaching and learning which placed the African and the Ghanaian at the very centre and core of study with a commendable element of intellectual rigour. In many ways this is what Nkrumah wanted too. The Danquah-Busia tradition involves some cross-pollination between Afro-centric and democratic political ideas, particularly the co-existence of different political traditions or parties. Although Fraser's concept of education in the Achimotan system contrasted with the concept of W.E.F. Ward and David Balme (Principal of the University College of the Gold Coast, 1948-1957), there was not a great deal of difference between them. It is significant to emphasise that although those debates were valid at the time, the current debates on History education in Ghana draw on the relationship between History education and political ideology, and highlight a possible tension between party political loyalty and an understanding of knowledge bases that can contribute to a plural democratic system. It is thus essential to balance attempts by political interest groups who wish to project the glory of any one particular historical and political hero with a more scholarly awareness of the complexity of independence narratives in Ghana's history and in the record of history education in Ghana. To ensure such a disciplinary approach in this enterprise, an ongoing but rigorous dialogue between university historians, government and teachers of history will be essential. The desirable outcome, enabling pupils and students to come to their own conclusions, should be that which gives the critical tools to use evidence informed by awareness of varied but relevant scholarly works and interpretations.

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