

# History Production after Undemocratic Regime Change: The Impact of Ghana's Competing Independence Narratives after the First Coup d'État on Peace and Political Stability

Clement Sefa-Nyarko

## Introduction

The turbulence that accompanies undemocratic regime changes often shakes the socio-political and economic structures of societies that experience them. Among others, the new centres of power restructure history through the manipulation of memory, 'since they decide which narratives should be remembered, preserved and disseminated'.<sup>1</sup> Controversies over the memory of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and the different narratives about Kwame Nkrumah and Ghana's First Republic typify this scenario. Narratives are subjective recall of events, real or abstract, and form fundamental part of collective memory. It is in fact *sine qua non* for national history reconstruction. Some scholars believe that the official Rwandese government narrative of the genocide 'selectively highlights some civilian memories of violence, and represses others in order to hide complicity of the Kagame regime in the hundred days of atrocities of 1994'.<sup>2</sup> The Rwandese government has also responded angrily to such attempts to accuse it of manipulating the history of the genocide. In October 2014, for instance, the government suspended British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio programmes from Rwandese airwaves through national legislation, in protest against a BBC documentary that the Rwandese government found offensive.<sup>3</sup> The BBC has

since defended the airing of the documentary and insisted on its neutrality in all its broadcasts.

The dominance of the victor's narrative is a common phenomenon in all post-conflict societies, especially those conflicts which are resolved through outright victory of one party. Conflicts that end through settlements have different dynamics, since main actors in the conflict come together for peace-building and state-building, and by implication, production of history for society. Educational policies and curricula are designed to achieve certain agenda suitable to the victor or main actors. These are likely to affect peace-building and reconciliation, since collective remembrance has healing effects on people who are grieved.<sup>4</sup>

The complexity of post-conflict history production is characteristic of post-Cold War Africa. Prior to this era, coup d'états were the main instruments of regime change, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and these became tools for both political stabilization and destabilization. Ghana presents a typical case where the writing and re-writing of history through coup d'états has progressively created a culture of silence which has contributed to political stability in the last third of its fifty-seven (57) years of existence. In history construction, culture of silence occurs when 'there is enduring absence of the whole truth' in narratives about the past and inherent deficiencies that lack fairness, accuracy and sensitivity to all members of society.<sup>5</sup> When

---

<sup>1</sup> Nascimento Araujo and Myrian dos Santos, 'History, Memory and Forgetting', *RCCS Annual Review*, 2009, par. 12, online at <http://rccsar.revues.org/157> (all online sources accessed last on 27 April 2015 unless otherwise stated).

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth King, 'Memory Controversies in Post-Genocide Rwanda: Implications for Peacebuilding', *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, Vol. 5 (2010), p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> 'Rwanda bans BBC broadcasts over genocide documentary', *The Guardian*, 24 October 2014, online at

---

[www.theguardian.com/media/2014/oct/24/rwanda-bans-bbc-broadcasts-genocide-documentary](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/oct/24/rwanda-bans-bbc-broadcasts-genocide-documentary)

<sup>4</sup> But this is true only as far as the remembrance is from their perspective.

<sup>5</sup> Rea Simigiannis, 'Do memory initiatives have a role in addressing cultures of silence that perpetuate impunity in South Africa?', *Perspectives Series Research Report for Impunity*

such culture of silence is imposed by the state, it could lead to systematic suppression of emotions and perspectives of some members of society in formal narratives. Societies also subtly impose culture of silence upon themselves after major tragic events, especially when the trauma associated with the tragedy is deep.<sup>6</sup> They do this through careful subconscious mechanisms that select what to remember and what to forget.<sup>7</sup>

Memory therefore becomes 'a selective process' that either 'become a political weapon' in the hands of power wielders to achieve subjective interests,<sup>8</sup> or a socio-cultural process of healing and connection with the past that shapes the present. The time it takes for this culture to fade depends on how traumatic the event is, but also on other social and political factors. In 2006, for instance, Tony Blair publicly declared 'his regret over British involvement in the slave trade over two hundred years earlier' and stated how 'profoundly shameful' the era was.<sup>9</sup> In responding to why it took so long for such a public acknowledgement, John Prescott, the then Deputy Prime Minister, responded in a way that explains how the culture of silence works in societies:

Like the Holocaust we are learning to talk about the slave trade openly and honestly. Tragic and terrible as it was, the slave trade defied anyone to talk about it because it was so horrendous.<sup>10</sup>

Some societies look back with regret at the occurrence and time span of their culture of

---

*Watch* (2012), p. V; P. Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation* (Macmillan, 1985)

<sup>6</sup> Sara McDowell, 'Time Elapsed: Untangling Commemorative Temporalities after Conflict and Tragedy', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2013), p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191; see also Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger, 'Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting', *Social Forces*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (2010), pp. 1103-1122, as well as Freire, *The Politics of Education*.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Paula Nascimento Araujo and Myrian Sepulveda dos Santos, 'History, Memory and Forgetting: Political Implications', *RCCS Annual Review*, No. 1, 2009

<sup>9</sup> McDowell, 'Time Elapsed', p. 185.

<sup>10</sup> P. Wintour, 'Commemoration Day to Recall Slave Trade and make UK Face up to Past', *The Guardian*, 23 March 2007, p. 4

silence, as in the case of Canadians after the bombing of an airline from Montreal to London in 1985 that led to the death of 329 people. After 22 years of silence, the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper unveiled a memorial in Toronto during which he expressed some guilt over the apathy of his countrymen over the event: 'Like bystanders at a public assault, many initially looked the other way and thought it's none of our business. It is terrible, hurtful mistake that Canada will always regret'.<sup>11</sup> Grayling justifies such silence and forgetting in his account of painful events at World War II:

Everyone wants to move on as quickly as possible after such immense trauma; the immediate post-war years were not a time for self-examination and a clear-eyed adjustment of accounts. Even in the much larger and more significant matter of the Holocaust, time had to pass before survivors and witnesses were able to recover enough, after a period of forgetting and silence, to address the experience and its profound meanings.<sup>12</sup>

Not all such cultures of silence evolve naturally. Some are imposed by politicians and power wielders as in the case of Ghana following the overthrow of Nkrumah.

Fifteen years after the imposition of cultures of silence over the memory of Nkrumah following his overthrow in 1966, the competing narratives about his memory in the post-1980 era of remembrance have created a forum for national conversation that has galvanized national cohesion and stability in the Fourth Republic.<sup>13</sup> National cohesion and political

---

<sup>11</sup> In McDowell, 'Time Elapsed', p. 186.

<sup>12</sup> A. C. Grayling, *All the Dead Cities: Is the Targeting of civilians in war ever justified?* (Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 207.

<sup>13</sup> Ghana has had four republican constitutions since independence in 1957. The First Republic was led by Kwame Nkrumah from 1960 to February 1966. The Second Republic was led by K. A. Busia (Prime Minister) between 1969 and 1972. The Third Republic was led by Hilla Limann (president) between 1979 and December 1981. The Fourth Republic has had three governments so far since 1992, and these have been led by Jerry John Rawlings, J. A. Kuffour, J. E. A. Mills and John Dramani Mahama. Prior to the Fourth Republic, each republic was truncated by police/military coup d'états.

stability have been achieved partly through the exceptional spotlight placed on Nkrumah – for or against him and his ideals (personality cults) – which has overshadowed sectarian, ethnic, religious and other ideological divisions in national politics. This paper explores how the remembrance of the memory of Nkrumah after fifteen years of imposition of culture of silence on his memory has contributed to sustainable national cohesion.

*Fundamental sources (history) of tension leading to the first coup d'état in Ghana in 1966*

The post-1950 history of Africa is mainly about struggles of nations for independence and post-independence nation-building. Post-independence violence and coup d'états erupted across the continent due to unmanaged expectations, mismanagement of state resources by the new leaders, the urge to remain in power for life, and the Cold War politics that afflicted nations. Much of the post-independence violence in sub-Saharan Africa could be explained from three main sources.

First, many of these new leaders, like Nkrumah and Nyerere in Tanzania, aspired for pan-Africanism (united Africa), with the hope of attaining political and economic integration of Africa. However, this vision was not shared by all the African elites at the time. In Ghana, Biney and Austin agree that one cause of conflict between Nkrumah and his political opponents was that the former wanted a united Ghana at all costs, whilst the latter (like the United Party) insisted on a kind of federal autonomy of the regions.<sup>14</sup> The opposition clashed with Nkrumah over his pan-African ideals, since they saw it as an attempt by his government to subdue local socio-political forces, especially within the Asante Kingdom of central Ghana.<sup>15</sup> Such clash of ideology was translated into real political victimisation, leading to the exiling and imprisonment of

<sup>14</sup> Ama Biney, *The Political and Social Thoughts of Kwame Nkrumah* (Macmillan, 2011), p. 89; Dennis Austin, *Ghana Observed: Essays on the Politics of a West African Republic* (Manchester University Press, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> Jean Marie Allman *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

prominent opposition members, some of whom died in prison (like J. B. Danquah).<sup>16</sup> Opposition members also launched many undercover, guerrilla-styled, attacks on Nkrumah's government.

A second source of tension existed between adherents of Capitalism and Socialism, supporters of the Western and Eastern blocs.<sup>17</sup> According to Biney, Nkrumah's drift towards the East in 1961 increased animosity against his government, gradually building up the pressure until his overthrow in 1966.<sup>18</sup> A third source of conflict centred on the timing for independence. Whilst some wanted gradual procession to independence after adequate development,<sup>19</sup> others saw any help from colonizers as the *Trojan horse*,<sup>20</sup> and thus demanded immediate independence. This informed Nkrumah's CPP motto of "Self-Governance Now", against the UGCC's motto of "Self-governance within the shortest possible time".

The combine effects of these and other ethno-political dynamics at the time led Nkrumah to take certain drastic decisions, thereby undermining the stability of his government. First, Avoidance of Discrimination Act was passed in 1957 to ban ethnic, religious and regional political parties. This Act motivated ethnic-based and religious political parties to coalesce into what became known as the United Party (UP),<sup>21</sup> and has found its way into the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. Second, drastic legislative measures were put in place to curtail the influence of traditional chiefs in national life, since they were unelected, and were thus seen as illegitimate representatives of the people.<sup>22</sup> Third, a

<sup>16</sup> Austin, *Ghana Observed*, p. 87.

<sup>17</sup> C. Young, *Ideology and Development in Africa* (Yale University Press, 1982), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Biney, *Kwame Nkrumah*, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> K. Botwe-Asamoah, *Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thoughts and Politics*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 90

<sup>20</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *West Africa Before Europe and Other Addresses Delivered in England in 1901 and 1903* (C. M. Phillips, 1905), p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> S. Kasock, *The Education of Nations: How the political organizations of the poor, not democracy, led governments to invest in mass education* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 196.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs* (Ohio State University Press, 2000), p. 100.

Preventive Detention Act (PDA) was passed by parliament in July 1958, empowering the government to “detain a person for five years (without right of appeal to the courts), for conduct prejudicial to the defense and security of the state and its foreign relations”.<sup>23</sup>

Many scholars agree that these factors together made legitimate opposition impossible under Nkrumah, and that the guerilla tactics adopted by his opponents affected the quality of his governance.<sup>24</sup> An assassination attempt was made on Nkrumah in 1956, and again at Kulungugu in 1962,<sup>25</sup> after which he declared a one-party state in 1964. Pressure mounted on his government until his overthrow by police and military elements in 1966. Nkrumah was made co-president of Guinea until his death in 1974.

#### *Nkrumah as a source of conflict and consensus after the 1966 coup d'état*

Despite leading Ghana to independence in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah has become a major source of conflict and consensus in Ghanaian history, especially in the period leading to, and after his overthrow in the first coup of 1966, which ushered in very turbulent fifteen-year period in the history of Ghana. Between 1966 and 1981, there were six coup d'états, four of which made sustained attempts to erase the memories of Nkrumah and his legacies. The multiple coup d'états, victimization, massive corruption and deteriorating socio-economic conditions,<sup>26</sup> however, brought a “nostalgic revival” of Nkrumah's regime by the late

1970s,<sup>27</sup> making the rule of Nkrumah represent the anti-thesis to military rule.<sup>28</sup> The sixth successful military coup d'état in 1981, led by Jerry Rawlings and the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) ushered in policy measures to rehabilitate and promote Nkrumah's memory, ideas and legacies.<sup>29</sup>

Such policies included establishment of a mausoleum and renaming of a prestigious Science and Technology University in memory of Nkrumah. Pre-tertiary textbooks were also used to glorify his legacies during drastic educational reforms in 1980s. This revival and rehabilitation of Nkrumah occurred within an autocratic framework and a culture of political silence that was characteristic of the various Ghanaian military regimes since 1966. Nonetheless, the PNDC regime established the longest period of political stability in postcolonial Ghana, partly due to the continuation of propagation of Nkrumahist ideals that had been initiated by the Hilla Limmam civilian regime, which was toppled by Rawlings and the PNDC. The PNDC military government ruled for eleven years, participated in a keenly contested multi-party election in 1992 as a political party called National Democratic Congress (NDC), and ruled as a constitutionally-elected government for eight additional years.

The multi-party democracy in 1992 did not only provide opportunity for articulating alternative political visions and programmes for Ghana; it also provided an avenue for reappraising the history of Ghana's nationhood. Supporters of the Big Six, the Danquah-Busia tradition of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) that was formed during British colonial rule, and United Party

<sup>23</sup> P. Biswal, *Ghana, Political and Constitutional Developments* (Northern Book, 1992), p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> Steven J. Salm and Toyin Falola. *Culture and Customs of Ghana* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), p. 25; also Biney, *Kwame Nkrumah*, p. 85, and Kasock, *Education of Nations*, p. 196.

<sup>25</sup> 'UP was behind Kulungugu Bombing – Baako Challenges Oquaye', *Ghana Web online*, 25 August, 2013, online at <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=283594>

<sup>26</sup> K. A. Ninsin, 'Elections, Democracy and Elite Consensus', in: Ninsin, K. A. (ed) *Ghana: Transition to Democracy* (CODESRIA, 1998); E. Gyimah-Boadi, 'Ghana's Fourth Republic: Championing the African Democratic Renaissance?', Briefing paper, *Ghana Center for Democratic Development*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2008), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> G. Macharia Munene, 'Leadership: Kenyatta and Nkrumah', in: Gerald J. Wanjohi and G. Wakuraya Wanjohi (eds.), *Social and Religious Concerns of East Africa, 10* (The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000), p. 108.

<sup>28</sup> The country embraced IMF economic recovery programmes like Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s, and Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) programme in 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Carola Lentz, "'Ghana@50": Celebrating the Nation – Debating the Nation', Working Paper No. 120 (Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Universitat Mainz, 2010), p. 8.

(UP) that was formed to challenge Nkrumah's rule, came together to form the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The Big Six is ascribed to six leaders of the first political party in Ghana, United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), who came to national prominence after their arrest by the British government in 1948. Members of the Big Six are Kwame Nkrumah, Ako-Adjei, Akufo-Addo, J. B. Dankwah, Obetsebi-Lampsey, and Ofori Atta. With the exception of Nkrumah, these were founding members of the UGCC.

During this democratic dispensation initiated in 1992, all the major political parties grasped that memory reinforces history, and history can be formulated by the powerful to shape the mindset of present and future generations.<sup>30</sup> The NPP in its political campaigns and after winning power in December 2000 (up to 2008) propagated pro-Big Six agenda, countering the NDC's pro Nkrumah narratives. A leading member of the NPP has described Nkrumah as "a personified tragedy of the twentieth century Africa", since according to him; Nkrumah is a symbol of the "political freedom that was won and lost, the promise that was missed, the economic experiment that led to our detriment".<sup>31</sup> This is notwithstanding the fact that Nkrumah is revered globally as a prominent African leader, and was voted the BBC African of the Millennium in December 1999. It is also despite the fact that all minor political parties in Ghana today, like the People's National Convention and Convention People's Party, extol Nkrumah as their mentor, the leader *par-excellence* in Ghanaian history.

Despite the NPP's fierce criticism of Nkrumah and events of the First Republic, the party recognizes that they cannot write him out of Ghanaian history. The extensive rehabilitation of Nkrumah by the NDC and his prominence in vernacular narratives has meant that the strategy of the NPP has hinged on diminishing his prominence while increasing overall

visibility and public memory of the UGCC and the Big Six which also include Nkrumah. The NPP government, therefore, printed images of the Big Six on five of Ghana Cedi notes after the currency was revalued in 2007.<sup>32</sup>

There is lack of consensus in formal narratives whether political decisions of Nkrumah were the causes or consequences of political unrest that led to his overthrow. The two dominant political traditions of this republic, the NDC and the NPP, interpret these differently. The controversy over interpretation is very conspicuous in pre-tertiary textbooks approved at different times by the governments of the two political parties. Textbook approved by the PNDC/NDC government, for instance, blamed political unrest and violence for Nkrumah's decision to declare one party state as follows:

From 1964 onwards, [Nkrumah] allowed the CPP to become the only political party in Ghana. This was because members of one political party regarded members of other political parties as enemies. This brought many dangers and made people feel unsafe. There were even attempts to kill the President. In these attempts, many innocent people were killed. Nkrumah therefore felt it was better to have only one party to unite all the people. It however was not liked by many people....<sup>33</sup>

The NPP government disagreed with this line of thought, and blamed Nkrumah's declaration of one party state and oppressive policies for much of the political unrest:

In 1964 Dr. Kwame Nkrumah banned all political parties and the CPP became the only party in the country. Ghana then became a one-party state. This was enough to create instability in the

<sup>30</sup> See Araujo and Santos, para 11; Ned R. Lebow, *The Politics of Ethnic Identity* (University of Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Gabby Otchere-Darko, 'Nkrumah Personified the Tragedy of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Africa' (2010), par. 1, online at <http://danquahinstitute.org/news/1361-gabby-nkrumah-personified-the-tragedy-of-20th-century-africa.html>

<sup>32</sup> Three years later, the NDC challenged the printing of the images of the Big Six on the five currency notes through the redesigning and printing of an additional currency note with only the image of Nkrumah.

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), *Social Studies for Junior Secondary Schools: Pupils Book 2*, Accra: CRDD, 1988, p. 32.

country.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, Nkrumah as a source of conflict and consensus in national life cannot be discounted. These competing narratives have negative consequences on pre-tertiary education, since different governments attempt to adjust the independence narratives to suit their own political traditions. People also view official narratives with some suspicion,<sup>35</sup> since experience over the years has shown that emphasis keeps changing with time and with changing governments, and corruption is ripe in many African countries. It requires thoughtful analysis to decipher the facts from the political spin.

#### *Impact on current national stability and cohesion*

The different phases of manipulation of the memory of Nkrumah, his legacies and political unrest that followed his overthrow,<sup>36</sup> were imposed silences comparable to the cultures of silence that evolve in societies immediately after the occurrence of traumatic experiences.<sup>37</sup> The duration of such cultures of silence varies significantly, depending on how deep the violence or tragedy is engrained in the collective

---

<sup>34</sup> Kofi Quansah and Charles Otu, *BECE Social Studies for JSS: Pupil's Book 3* ( Sedco Publishing, 2005b), p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> Wonbin Cho and Matthew F. Kirwin, 'A vicious circle of corruption and mistrust in institutions in sub-Saharan Africa: A micro-level analysis', A comparative series of national public attitude surveys on democracy, markets and civil society in Africa, Working Paper No. 71, Afrobarometer, Accra, September 2007; Daniel Armah-Attoh, Edward Ampratwum and Jeffrey Paller, 'Political Accountability in Ghana: Evidence from Afrobarometer Round 5 Survey', Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 136, Accra, March 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Austin, *Ghana Observed*. For further account of unrests during the Nkrumah regime, see also a lecture by Mike Oquaye titled: 'The National Liberation Movement (NLM), the United Party (UP) and the politics of pluralism in Ghana' at Kumasi, 7 September 2012, online at [http://baffuorakoto.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=50:lecture-by-hon-prof-mike-oquaye-&catid=36:lectures&Itemid=54](http://baffuorakoto.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50:lecture-by-hon-prof-mike-oquaye-&catid=36:lectures&Itemid=54)

<sup>37</sup> McDowell, 'Time Elapsed'; for a similar experience of imposed culture of silence following the 2008 violence of Zimbabwe, see Obediah Dodo, Chamunogwa Nyoni and David Makwererei, 'Silence as an Endogenous Mode of Post-Conflict Healing and Reconciliation: Zimbabwe Post-2008 Election Violence', *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2012) , pp. 1-17.

social psyche.<sup>38</sup> Rawlings challenged the culture of silence imposed on the memory of the First Republic of Ghana, although the memory which emerged was skewed towards Nkrumah and his legacies. The emergence of genuine multi-party democracy in 1992, however, marked the complete termination of the culture of silence, progressively harmonizing both vernacular and formal narratives of the First Republic. Conversations around Nkrumah – for and against him – provided a referent point for national cohesion that was potent in galvanizing the various centres of power like ethnicity, religion and political ideologies. The ensuing national conversations helped to instill a platform for multi-party democracy. The stable democratic dispensation has provided political and social space for competitive narratives from pro- and anti-Nkrumah adherents. In this competitive socio-political space, multiple platforms like radio stations, think tank organizations, national monuments, political parties, and Social Studies textbooks have been adopted to sustain the conversation.

The national currency notes, the Ghana Cedi, for instance, has become a platform for displaying this tension. All the currency notes printed by the Bank of Ghana during the era of the NPP government as part of a redenomination exercise in 2007 have pictures of the Big Six on them. However, two years after the NDC regained power in 2008, the Bank of Ghana added an additional currency note, Two Ghana Cedis, which has only the image of Nkrumah embossed on in front. These currency notes are still in circulation as the legal tender for business in Ghana. When the NDC government declared September 21 as Founder's Day, the Atta-Mills government insisted that the 'Founder's' is in the singular possessive form, referring only to Kwame Nkrumah's exceptional contribution to the founding of Ghana. Members of the NPP have found this to be offensive, since according to them, Ghana could not have been founded by a single individual. They are proposing that the day be named 'Founders' Day, in order to acknowledge the contributions of all the prominent Ghanaians who contributed to the founding of the nation. This is a topical debate

---

<sup>38</sup> McDowell, 'Time Elapsed', p. 187.

in Ghana presently.

The culture of silence imposed during the first fifteen years after the fall of the government of Nkrumah helped to purify the memory of the violence and mistrust associated with the collective struggle for independence and political schism experienced in the first republic, which culminated into the coup d'état. On the down side, this affected transitional justice, since new governments were only interested in prosecuting ministers and supporters of the Nkrumah regime. The only conversation about Nkrumah and his regime after the 1966 coup sought to incriminate all those associated with his regime. The PNDC government, preceded albeit shortly by the Limmam government (1979-1981), reversed this trend. The eleven years that followed prepared the country for another phase, where the public discourse was extended beyond Nkrumah. The gradual public remembrance of contributions of personalities associated with the past – Nkrumah, Danquah, Busia – successfully warded off potentially destabilizing ethnic cleavages in national politics. This is notwithstanding the fact that some degree of *ethnisation* of politics exist among some ethnic groups in Ghana.<sup>39</sup>

Due to the lessons drawn from ethnic politics before and after independence, ethnic, religious and regional political parties are officially banned in Ghana (Article 55 of The Constitution). Political discourse mainly centres on personalities and their past achievements, although there is a gradual shift in emphasis towards political ideology. This has created personality cults and *Great Man* syndrome in dominant political discourses, highlighting personalities like Nkrumah, Rawlings, Atta Mills, J. A. Kuffour, and Paa Kwasi Nduom. The merit of such emphasis on personality in national politics remains an area that requires further research.

In Ghana, the emphasis on personalities and their track records has reduced the risk of mass ethnic upheavals along political traditions,

---

<sup>39</sup> E. Gyimah-Boadi and R. Asante, 'Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Public Sector Governance in Ghana', in Yusuf Bangura (ed.), *Ethnic Inequalities and Public Sector Governance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 248.

averting the occurrence of the Kaufmann thesis, which postulate that ethnic hatred moulded into national politics triggers emotional hostility, antagonism, domination, and in extreme cases, conflict.<sup>40</sup> This is an important explanation for Ghana's recent history of political stability, where the *Great Man* syndrome and personality cult have overshadowed underlying religious, ethnic and sectarian tensions.

Other factors which complement explanations for Ghana's relative political stability in the last three and half decades include vibrant civil society organizations and fearless media which capitalized on gradual opening of the political space for multi-party democracy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The fact that Anglophone Ghana is sandwiched by Francophone countries – Togo, Cote D'Ivoire and Baukina Faso – also means that the tight borders with Ghana discourage infiltration of rebel groups and dissidents into the country. The strong political and economic connection between these countries and France has meant that there has been little socio-economic and political interference with Ghanaian affairs. This has turned Ghana into a socio-political island in the sub-region, minding its own domestic affairs. In this sense, the major pre occupation of the security agencies has been to tighten naval security patrols and surveillance in the Gulf of Guinea which borders Ghana to the south. Domestic national cohesion therefore becomes an important determinant of peace and stability; whilst stable diplomatic relationship with the international community remains a crucial catalyst for sustaining its democratic credentials. This is because the norms of international diplomatic engagement requires strict adherence to certain standards of governance, human rights and civil participation; thereby increasing legitimacy of the regimes.

### Conclusion

The changing and competitive narratives over the years have contributed to sustained national cohesion. Nkrumah has become a source of

---

<sup>40</sup> S.J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatred: The Symbolic Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

unity and disunity, as his memory elicits immediate emotional discourse about the past, irrespective of the ethnic, religious or regional background of persons in Ghana. At the same time, the Danquah-Busia tradition has continued to represent an antithesis to Nkrumah. This has kept a national dialogue in motion, overshadowing elements of ethnic and religious allegiances in national politics. The Nkrumah factor, including the dialogue it generates between his supporters and his opponents, has helped to sustain political stability, especially after the revival of his memory by the Rawlings regime in the 1980s. It has therefore had a positive impact on Ghana's multi-party democracy. The PNDC/NDC and the NPP have spearheaded this interaction in the last three decades, galvanizing the nation around the Nkrumah factor and the Independence euphoria. The success of this revival in establishing sustained political stability hinged on the fact that the culture of silence imposed after the first coup d'état provided a transition for history and memories to be purified, both in formal and informal spaces. Some degree of culture of silence is needed in all post-violence societies; and this must be natural transitions based on people's need to forget and remember at a later date. If this has to be imposed in an unnatural context of the victor's narratives after armed conflict, this must be done in ways that respects the rights, preferences and tempo of persons and societies. It remains a dilemma, however, the optimum duration of such period of silence, and presents a challenge to fairness in transitional justice.

---