

RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Institute of Residual Studies? Nkrumah and the “Afroepistemic” Origins of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana

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Abstract

This paper examines the development of the University of Ghana’s Institute of African Studies (IAS), arguing that the landscape of decolonial epistemology is more complex than is often assumed. Drawing on new archival documents it maps out the different landscape of ideas regarding its decolonial origins — phase one (1948–50), phase two (1954–61), and phase three (1960–63) — not only to elucidate problems of defining what decolonial work should entail but also as a historical study of how people associated with the IAS contributed to defining and activating a decolonial project. It shows Nkrumah’s specific instrumentality to its emergence through an African-centred or “Afroepistemic” approach to African Studies. It also highlights how the decolonial imperative was shaped by different historical moments.

Keywords: West Africa; Ghana; decolonisation; education; epistemology

Recent agitations about decolonising the academy epitomised by the Rhodes Must Fall protests and its manifold protest movements resonate with many institutions of higher learning in Africa because of the colonial legacies in many of these institutions.¹ This decolonial movement ranges from decolonising spaces, curriculum, faculty, the iconography on campuses to reversing the marginalisation of Africans in the production and dissemination of knowledge about Africa.

Decolonising university education in Africa, however, is not a new phenomenon. In Ghana (Gold Coast), for example, it predates the establishment of universities by European colonialists. Influential African intellectuals like Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford envisaged a university that, while international in outlook, would be adapted to African circumstances because “the crux of the educational question, as it affects the African, is that western methods denationalise him. He becomes a slave to foreign ways of life and thought.”² Hence, he argued that there was a need for the establishment of an African-centred university.

¹Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Rhodes Must Fall” in *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialisation and Decolonisation*, ed. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (London: Routledge, 2018), 221–42; Anye Nyamnjoh, “The Phenomenology of Rhodes Must Fall: Student Activism and the Experience of Alienation at the University of Cape Town,” *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 39, no.1 (2021): 256–77.

²Casely Hayford, “Barrister Hayford on the Race Question to the Editor of the Weekly News, May 5, 1908” in Edward W. Blyden, *African Life and Customs: Reprinted from “The Sierra Leone Weekly News”* (London: C. M. Phillips, 1908), 84.

Edward Wilmot Blyden had earlier recommended to the African Society, which was established to study African history and culture, to take such an African-centred approach. He urged extensive study and appreciation of African languages, and he sought institutional support in African settings of the sort that the Institute of African Studies would provide under President Kwame Nkrumah.³ He had also earlier asked for the establishment of a university adapted to the needs of the people in a letter to Governor Pope Hennessy of Sierra Leone in 1872, which the governor approved.⁴ James Africanus Horton before him had also pleaded for a West African university in the 1860s.⁵

In the 1940s when the British finally decided to establish universities in their colonial possessions in West Africa, their approach to implementing it was not without contestations within the colonies. In the Gold Coast, people protested the colonial government's decision to implement the minority position of the Elliot Commission tasked to investigate higher education in West Africa. While the majority position on the commission recommended two universities in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, the minority report recommended one university for the whole of West Africa.⁶ The protests — which contributed to the government's decision to change course and go with the majority decision — reflected an acute awareness of the relationship between higher education and decolonisation.

At independence, the postcolonial state, Mahmood Mamdani argues, was more interested in deracialising the university than decolonising it. He notes,

As the midwife of the modern university, the modern state had a limited vision: the university would produce the personnel necessary to deracialize the state and society. Limited to deracialization of personnel, both within the university and in the wider society, this vision had yet to engage either the institutional form or the curricular content that breathed life into it.⁷

While this is true in many respects, the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana (UG), as Jean Allman points out, was considered by Nkrumah as the “the vanguard of a pan-African movement to re-imagine and re-invent how knowledge about Africa was produced, interpreted and circulated.”⁸ There was at least some conception of decolonising the disciplines, if not the university. This paper maps out the different ideas regarding the decolonial origins of African Studies at UG.

This is imperative as African Studies is often regarded as a postcolonial project because of the perceived lack of interest in or disdain for African history and culture on the part of the colonialists. Indeed, the establishment of the IAS is often credited to Nkrumah.⁹ However, as studies show, the origins and establishment of IAS predate Nkrumah.¹⁰ While these works on the history of the institute

³ Edward Wilmot Blyden, *The African Society and Miss Mary Kingsley* (London: John Scott and Co., 1901).

⁴ Apollon O. Nwauwa, *Imperialism, Academe and Nationalism: Britain and University Education for Africans, 1860–1960* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1997).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ University of Ghana, “History,” website, <https://www.ug.edu.gh/about-ug/history>, accessed 16 Dec. 2024.

⁷ Mahmood Mamdani, “Between the Public Intellectual and the Scholar: Decolonization and some Post-Independence Initiatives in African Higher Education,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2016): 71.

⁸ Jean Allman, “Kwame Nkrumah, African Studies, and the Politics of Knowledge Production in the Black Star of Africa,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46, no. 2 (2013): 192.

⁹ See, for example, L. Agyei-Gyane, “The Development and Administration of the Africana Collection in the Balme Library, University of Ghana, Legon,” *Libri* 37, no. 3 (1987): 222–38. Similarly, a 3 Aug. 2022 post in some WhatsApp groups on the achievements of Nkrumah includes the founding of the institute. This same list of achievements is also available on Facebook: see a post by Cape Coast Oguua, 4 Aug. 2022, https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1264462924322607&id=454786941956880&_rdc=1&_rdr, accessed 18 Dec. 2024. Many students at UG also named Nkrumah as the founder of the institute in a survey of the author's undergraduate and graduate classes. This may have been influenced by the institute's new office complex which is named after Nkrumah and the endowed chair in African Studies named after Nkrumah.

¹⁰ Francis Agbodeka, *A History of University of Ghana: Half a Century of Higher Education, 1948–1998* (Accra: Woeli Pub. Services, 1998); Takyiwa Manuh, “Building Institutions for the New Africa: The Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana,” in *Change and Transformation in Ghana's Publicly Funded Universities: A Study of Experiences, Lessons and Opportunities*, eds. Takyiwa Manuh, Sulley Gariba, and Joseph Budu (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), 268–84; Allman, “Kwame Nkrumah.”

are very useful in showing Nkrumah's role in the development of the institute, they fail to interrogate the alternative visions of the institute that was established in various phases.

Drawing on new archival documents that show the protracted debates before the formal establishment of the institute in 1960, this paper argues that the landscape of decolonial epistemology is more complex than is often assumed. It delineates three phases — phase one (1948–50), phase two (1954–61), and phase three (1960–63) — not only to elucidate problems of defining what decolonial work should entail but also as a historical study of how people associated with the IAS contributed to defining and activating a decolonial project. This begs a question: what did Nkrumah achieve as he worked to free African Studies from colonial thinking? This paper shows Nkrumah's specific instrumentality to African Studies' emergence through an African-centred or "Afroepistemic" approach, by which I mean the excavation, diffusion, and application of knowledge of Africa (herein defined not as Africa south of the Sahara but the continent and its diaspora), its peoples, and institutions in deliberate ways to bring about transformation. This privileges indigenous knowledge systems and information dissemination mediums that resonate with the people. This Afroepistemic approach is encapsulated in Nkrumah's "African Genius" speech, which outlined "guiding principles" at the formal opening of the institute in 1963.¹¹ The paper also highlights how the decolonial imperative was shaped by different historical moments.

Following this introductory section, this paper examines the colonial paradigm of African Studies by looking carefully at what it has entailed in certain places and times to show its complexity. This is followed by a brief history of the establishment of IAS to highlight the role of some of the key actors. It then maps the landscape of decolonial epistemology to show what was new with Nkrumah's intervention and what he achieved in decolonising IAS.

A colonial paradigm of African Studies

Francis Agbodeka, who has written the most authoritative work on the history of UG, notes that African Studies was among the earliest programmes to be conceived when the university was established in 1948. He suggests that the colonial interest in African Studies may have emanated from the Inter-Universities Council due probably to "the age-long African pressure for inclusion of African Studies in the curricula of proposed African universities."¹²

This paper however points to colonial interest in African Studies before the Inter-Universities Council. For instance, at Achimota College — which was established in 1927 as the first government co-educational boarding school in the Gold Coast — there was a conscious attempt to make students appreciate African history and culture.¹³ Agbodeka acknowledges that "quite apart from physical appearance, Achimota College developed a program that was being oriented towards African Studies, already a catchword in cultivated indigenous West Coast Society."¹⁴ Cati Coe also notes that "Achimota was a serious experiment made by idealistic people to bring together 'the best' of African and European culture through progressive modes of education."¹⁵ This is captured in the *Achimota Review* of 1937,

Achimota aims at the provision of the best education that can be provided for a bi-cultural people in Africa in very close contact with Europe; a people that undoubtedly has been retarded but equally undoubtedly has not been shown to be inferior... An education that would incorporate,

¹¹ Kwame Nkrumah, "The African Genius," speech delivered by Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah, President of the Republic of Ghana at the opening of the Institute of African Studies on 25 Oct. 1963 (Accra: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, n.d. [ca. 1963]).

¹² Agbodeka, *History of University of Ghana*, 60.

¹³ Achimota School, "Background," website, <https://www.achimota.edu.gh/about>, accessed 12 Dec. 2022.

¹⁴ Agbodeka, *History of University of Ghana*, 4.

¹⁵ Cati Coe, "Educating an African Leadership: Achimota and the Teaching of African Culture in the Gold Coast," *Africa Today* 49, no. 3 (2002): 24.

and encourage pride in, all that is good and beautiful and useful in the ancient traditions and inherited skill of the people.¹⁶

This stemmed from the view held by some colonial officials who saw the educated people as “deracinated caricatures of civilization and education” and therefore tried to mould a new type of educated African who would appreciate his culture.¹⁷ Governor Gordon Guggisberg, who is credited with the establishment of Achimota College, in his education policy of 1919, stated:

Our aim is not to denationalise [the people of the Gold Coast], but to graft skillfully on to their national characteristics the best attributes of modern civilisation. For without preserving his national characteristics and his sympathy and touch with the great illiterate masses of his own people, no man can ever become a leader in progress, whatever other sort of leader he may become.¹⁸

Thus, when the University College of the Gold Coast (UCGC) — which has its roots in Achimota College — was established in 1948, some of these thoughts on African Studies were already being experimented with.¹⁹ Former students like Mawere Opoku, a professor of African dance and one of the pioneer staff at the IAS, recalls, “as Achimotans, we felt proud that we were Africans.”²⁰

Yet, despite this “progressive” attitude in education towards African culture, which contained elements of Afroepistemic education during the colonial period, its colonial character can be gleaned from the idea of “grafting,” which seeks to impose European values on Africa. What these “national characteristics” were and how to preserve them was the prerogative of the European colonialists. Even “progressives” such as the African Society paraphrasing Miss Mary Henrietta Kingsley, a “friend” of Africa, stated,

Miss Kingsley held that the right way to bring out the full value of British West Africa is, not in the direction of trying to force European civilisation and customs on natives who already have a different, if rudimentary, social system of their own, but first to study this indigenous system, which must to some extent be suited to its environment, and then to select from this, and develop the better and more useful elements.²¹

This served as the colonial template of African Studies with a focus on languages and culture. This point is echoed by Allman, who notes that what was envisaged when a Department of African Studies was conceived at the University College of the Gold Coast it was “in rather typical colonial or ‘area studies’ form, on languages and culture.”²²

This was not dissimilar to other colonial establishments such the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, which was one of the leading African Studies centres. Founded on 5 June 1916 as the School of Oriental Studies, it changed its name to the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1938 when it established a Department of African Languages and Cultures following a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Among its key functions was to equip colonial officials and others with knowledge of the history and culture of the spaces they were going to exploit.²³ As Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza records, the first lectureship in African history was set up at SOAS, and thereafter an “African studies developed and became a bona fide discipline within the former colonial

¹⁶ Cited in Coe, “Educating,” 23.

¹⁷ Coe, “Educating,” 27.

¹⁸ Cited in Coe, “Educating,” 27–28.

¹⁹ On Achimota College and UG, see, Agbodeka, *History of University of Ghana*.

²⁰ Cited in Coe, “Educating,” 37.

²¹ Cited in Blyden, *African Society*, 11.

²² Allman, “Kwame Nkrumah,” 184.

²³ SOAS, “SOAS centenary,” website, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210118173454/https://www.soas.ac.uk/centenary/the-soas-story/>, accessed 28 Oct. 2023.

powers because of the existence of the Africa of colonial memory.”²⁴ This was largely influenced by the institutional connections between African institutions and their British counterparts, particularly SOAS, Oxford, and Cambridge. In addition, the staff of the African institutions were products of the European universities. In the case of UCGC, it was affiliated with the University of London until 1962, when it became independent and began to award its own degrees and diplomas.

It is however worth noting that some at SOAS challenged the colonial model and among them was Roland Oliver who was instrumental in rewriting African history from an African perspective. This was contrary to claims by historians such as Hugh Trevor-Roper that Africa had no history, describing it as “unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant parts of the globe.”²⁵ Thus, one could discern elements of Afroepistemic education within the colonial establishment, pointing to a longer and nuanced origin. We now turn to how people associated with IAS worked their way to defining and activating a decolonial project.

The Institute of African Studies: a brief history

This paper categorises the establishment of IAS at UG into three phases: phase one (1948–50), phase two (1954–61), and phase three (1960–63). Periodisation, Zeleza rightly points out, is not only “essential to historical explanation and coherence” but also “contextualizes events and processes, giving them meaning and importance.”²⁶ The three-phase story not only contextualises Nkrumah’s decolonial project but also challenges the common contemporary misconception that the IAS was simply a product of Nkrumah’s era.

Secondly, the three-phase story helps situate IAS’ “golden era,” which the paper locates in the third phase under Nkrumah. Zeleza describes the period between the 1950s and the 1970s as the “golden era” of African studies and African universities, which was

characterized by the excitement of building new universities and expanding old ones, all underpinned by the triumph of African nationalism and the euphoria of independence. During this era, vigorous efforts were made to decolonize the disciplines, to strip them of their Eurocentric cognitive and civilizational conceits.²⁷

For IAS, this occurred in the early 1960s; in the years immediately following independence in 1957, the paper shows, the institute had not fully shed its colonial garments.

Phase one: 1948–50

In 1948, the UCGC was established and Kofi Abrefa Busia — who had just completed his doctorate at Oxford in social anthropology — was appointed the first lecturer in African Studies.²⁸ He started work in 1949 and was tasked with developing a department or school of African Studies. This lasted for barely a year; by 1950 it had folded up.²⁹

Allman argues that the department’s focus was to be on languages and culture. However, the records of Busia present a different picture. According to the man appointed to set up the department, African Studies as he conceived it “was going to take under its wing, archaeology, language,

²⁴Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “African Studies and Universities Since Independence,” *Transition: An International Review* 101 (2009): 120.

²⁵Cited in A. J. R. Russell-Wood, “African History: Unrewarding Gyrations or New Perspectives on the Historian’s Craft,” *The History Teacher* 17, no. 2 (1984): 247.

²⁶Zeleza, “African Studies,” 112.

²⁷Zeleza, “African Studies,” 112.

²⁸Busia later became the Prime Minister of Ghana (1969–72).

²⁹Agbodeka, *History of University of Ghana*; Manuh, “Building Institutions;” Allman, “Kwame Nkrumah.”

anthropology, sociology and so on.”³⁰ Considering that the departments of sociology, archaeology, and law were offshoots of the embryo of the African Studies department — following the works done by Busia on funeral customs in African societies, Kurankyi Taylor on African law, and Joseph Hanson Kwabena Nketia on African musicology, linguistics, and folklore — this may have been the case.³¹

In this regard, one can deduce different visions for the short-lived institute of the first phase. It is unclear though how decolonial it would have been. John Donnelly Fage has suggested that the department did not materialise because Busia was not interested in African Studies.³² Busia on the other hand points to his enthusiasm for the project. He explained that the reason for its failure was that it was “too big a conception to be realised at the time.”³³ Besides, he went on, he had difficulty in finding someone to head it as the person he had in mind had refused to take up the offer. Considering that he was a pioneer in the study of African institutions and culture particularly chieftaincy, one can presume that it would have included some decolonial elements.³⁴

Phase two: 1954–61

In this phase the establishment of the institute was the subject of discussions at various levels of the university — faculty boards, general board, council of senate, and convocation — spanning about half a decade before its establishment in 1960. It was based on a proposal by Peter Shinnie.³⁵ The records indicated that this proposal was vehemently opposed by some faculty, pointing to differing visions — some more decolonial than others — for the institute.

By 1954 the establishment of an Institute of African Studies had come under consideration again at the UCGC.³⁶ Little was done until 1959, when Fage prepared a draft scheme following a meeting held in December 1958.³⁷ At a meeting of the general board on 19 October 1959, there was a brief discussion of the establishment of the Institute of African Studies and the Institute of Islamic Studies

³⁰J. H. Nketia Archives, IAS, K. A. Busia in an interview with K. N. Bame, n.d. Busia chaired a committee set up by A. A. Kwapong, the vice-chancellor of University of Ghana on the reorganisation on the Institute of African Studies following the overthrow of Nkrumah's government in 1966.

³¹Agbodeka, *History of University of Ghana*; Manuh, “Building Institutions”; Allman, “Kwame Nkrumah.” Nketia became one of the preeminent scholars of African music authoring several important works on the subject. These include the classic *Music of Africa* (London: Gollancz, 1974) and the widely used teaching material *Ethnomusicology and African Music* (Accra: Afram Publications, 2005). He was also a prolific composer, among his works being the University of Ghana anthem. He became the first African director of the Institute of African Studies in 1964. See Kwasi Ampene, “J. H. Kwabena Nketia,” *Oxford Bibliographies: Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). See also, Giovanni Russonello, “J. H. Kwabena Nketia, 97, Pre-eminent Scholar of African Music, Dies,” *The New York Times*, 19 Mar. 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/19/obituaries/jh-kwabena-nketia-dead.html>, accessed 18 Sep. 2024.

³²See Allman, “Kwame Nkrumah,” 184.

³³Busia, “Report.”

³⁴K. A. Busia, *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* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951); K. A. Busia, “The Sociology and Culture of Africa: Its Nature and Scope,” published inaugural address (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1960)

³⁵Shinnie, a British archaeologist, was a pioneer of African archaeology. His career interests spanned over the Ghana and the Sudan, where he trained a generation of African archaeologists. He spent extensive periods in Ghana and married a Ghanaian, Ama Shinnie, who survived him. His important works include *Meroe: A Civilization of the Sudan* (New York: Praeger, 1967) and, with F. J. Kense, *Archaeology of Gonja, Ghana: Excavations at Daboya* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1989). See, Peter Clark, “Peter Shinnie,” *The Guardian*, 30 Oct. 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/oct/30/guardianobituaries>, accessed 18 Sep. 2024.

³⁶University of Ghana Archives (UG), UG1/3/2/3/78, R. H. Stoughton et. al. “Report of the General Board on the Establishment of an Institute of African Studies,” 16 May 1960; IAS, H. Dowouna, Registrar, to Shinnie, 19 Apr. 1960.

³⁷Fage, a British historian, was a leading authority on African history. He was instrumental in shaping the course of the study of African history by cofounding *The Journal of African History*, a leading journal in its field which he coedited for several years. He was also instrumental in founding the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom. His publications include *Introduction to the History of West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955) and, with Roland Oliver, *A Short History of Africa* (London: Penguin, 1962). He also worked on and contributed to the influential UNESCO *General History of Africa* project. See Douglas Rimmer, “John Donnelly Fage,” *The Journal of African History* 27, no. 2 (1986): 193–201.

following which the principal of UCGC, David Mowbray Balme, asked the faculties of art and social sciences to make firm proposals on it. The secretary to the general board asked Geoffrey Walton of the English Department to call a meeting of the two boards as the convener of a committee to examine progress towards the establishment of the institute.³⁸

It is unclear if such a meeting occurred, but on 10 November 1959 an interim committee on African Studies chaired by Shinnie produced a report of a discussion on the IAS.³⁹ According to Shinnie, he was asked by the principal during the Michaelmas term (October–December 1959) to set up a committee to prepare a detailed scheme, together with estimates, on how it could be implemented.⁴⁰ This request came about in his conversations with the principal on how to establish the institute.⁴¹ The committee he set up was comprised of Christian G. Baeta, John G. St. Clair Drake, Graham W. Irwin, Shinnie, and Walton.⁴² A permanent committee was later established to replace the interim one. The latter included Adam Curle.⁴³ At the first meeting of the newly constituted committee held on 3 May 1960 it recommended the addition of its first female member, the linguist Cath McCallien. It also approved Ephraim Amu's request to be associated with the institute.⁴⁴

³⁸UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, letter from Secretary, General Board to G. Walton, 27 Oct. 1959.

³⁹UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, Interim Committee for African Studies, "Report of a Discussion of the Interim Committee for African Studies," 10 Nov. 1959.

⁴⁰IAS, Letter from Shinnie to Registrar, 19 Apr. 1960.

⁴¹According to Allman, Shinnie was approached by Fage in 1958 to set up an "Institute of West African Languages and Cultures." See Allman, "Kwame Nkrumah," 185. Unfortunately, the author could not locate this file in IAS which may be due to reorganisation of the archive. However, a later letter from Shinnie to Fage responds to Fage's correspondence of 19 Jan. 1959 and references the draft memorandum on IAS. IAS, letter from Shinnie to Fage, 3 Feb. 1959.

⁴²Interim Committee, "Report of a Discussion." Baeta, a revered Ghanaian theologian and academic, played an important part in the founding of the UCGC. He served as the synod clerk of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast from 1945 to 1949. He also held several positions at the university including head of the Department of the Study of Religion, dean of the Faculty of Arts, and pro-vice chancellor. Among his notable publications are *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some "Spiritual" Churches* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1963) and his edited volume *Christianity in Tropical Africa: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Seventh International African Seminar, University of Ghana, April 1965* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). See, Agbodeka, *History of University of Ghana*. See also, "Baeta, Christian G(oncalves) K(wami) (1908–1994): Presbyterian church leaders from the Gold Coast (Ghana)," webpage, Boston University School of Theology, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180527194917/http://www.bu.edu/missiology/2017/08/17/baeta-christian-goncalves-kwami-1908-1994/>, accessed 18 Sep. 2024, reprint from *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: Macmillan Reference, 1998). St. Clair Drake was an African American anthropologist, Pan-Africanist, and social activist whose works examined race, class, and status. He was one of the pioneers of African Studies programs in the United States. His publications include *Churches and Voluntary Associations among Negroes in Chicago* (Illinois: W. P. A. District 3, 1940) and, co-authored with Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945). See Timothy P. Daniels, "Ruminations of Du Bois, Davis and Drake," *Transforming Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (2000): 30–43. See also, W. Gabriel Selassie I, "St. Clair Drake (1911–1990)," webpost on BlackPast.org, 21 Jan. 2007, (<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/drake-st-clair-1911-1990/>), accessed 18 Sep. 2024. The Australian born Irwin was a historian of precolonial West Africa, and particularly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gold Coast. He was appointed to the History Department in 1958 initially to teach European colonialism. He also specialised in the African diaspora. He was a pioneer in teaching the history of Africa and its diaspora. His works include *Africans Abroad: A Documentary History of the Black Diaspora in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean During the Age of Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). See, *Columbia University Record*, "In Memoriam: Graham W. Irwin," 25 Oct. 1911, reprinted in "Provisional Minutes," *ASA News* 25, no. 1 (1992): 4.

⁴³IAS, letter from D. E. Bennett, Secretary, General Board, to Shinnie, 18 Feb. 1960.

Curle was a British academic. He was appointed as Professor of Education in 1959. His specialty was in pedagogy, development studies and peace studies. Some his works include *The Role of Education in Developing Societies* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1961) and *Making Peace* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971). See Archives Hub, "Description of Adam Curle Archive, University of Bradford Special Collections. GB 532 CUR," website, <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/c51be206-a306-3ea1-9404-60fead28e3b0>, accessed 18 Sep. 2024.

⁴⁴IAS, "Committee for African Studies, Minutes of the 1st Meeting," 3 May 1960. Amu became one of Ghana's most renowned musicologists. He is famous not only as the composer of Ghana's unofficial anthem "Yen Ara Asaase Ni" (This is our homeland) but also as a staunch advocate of African cultural practices particularly pride in wearing of African clothes. He decided not to become a priest after being summoned by the church court for wearing African attire to preach on Sunday. His works include *Twenty-five African Songs in the Twi Language: Music and words by E. Amu* (London: Sheldon Press, 1932) and *Choral Works*

Shinnie and his committee built on the work of Fage to produce financial estimates for the institute in the quinquennial budget of 1959.⁴⁵ The Shinnie committee agreed with the approach outlined in Fage's proposal, and recommended that — subject to a special financial grant being made available — the institute should be established in 1959/60 year along the following lines:

The collecting, studying, and publishing of material relating to the cultures of Africa not otherwise catered for in the College and in particular to:-

1. Record, analyse, and map the distribution of African languages
2. Collect, record, translate, and publish chronicles, folk-tales, music, dance and other cultural material
3. Provide specialised knowledge and training to assist those departments of the College whose teaching and research bears on aspects of African culture;
4. Provide facilities for research workers from outside the College who are engaged in studies of modern African culture and language.⁴⁶

This followed the “typical colonial” model of African Studies with emphasis on languages. Yet, as Africanist scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o have argued, a decolonial university should centre African languages in its teaching and learning. It is at the heart of decolonising the mind.⁴⁷ What this points to is that what constitutes a decolonial institution is subject to different interpretations. This is echoed by Shinnie in his rebuttal to Emil Richard Rado of the Economics Department that the study of African languages could not be described as “trivial or residual” but was instead “a most obvious gap in the work of this College — one that we must fill.”⁴⁸

Rado had criticised the report when it was brought before the convocation of the senate on 7 June 1960. He made an interesting submission regarding the Shinnie committee's proposals. He noted:

The document before us clearly indicates that the name given to it is a misnomer. This is to be no Institute of African Studies — it should, in all honesty, be named Institute of Residual Studies, doing odd jobs which no other Department wants to do or which do not conveniently fit into the existing pattern.⁴⁹

Rado was baffled that he and some colleagues who were already doing African Studies had no role in the new institute. These discussions further raise important questions not only on the various decolonial ideas regarding the institute but also alternate visions of the institute. The first is what constitutes “proper” African Studies. As Mamdani's experience decades later at University of Cape Town shows, this is very much contested.⁵⁰ It is worth noting that Rado was not alone in this position. Jack Goody also raised similar concerns in a letter to Shinnie in which he stated that:

(Accra: Waterville Publishing, 1993). See D. E. K. Amenumey, *Outstanding Ewes of the 20th Century. Profiles of Fifteen Firsts*, vol. 1. (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2002); Misonu Amu, *Stylistic and Textual Sources of contemporary Ghanaian Art Music composer. A case study: Dr. Ephraim Amu* (MPhil. thesis, University of Ghana, 1988).

⁴⁵ IAS, H. Dowouna, Registrar, to Shinnie, 19 Apr. 1960; Interim Committee, “Report of a Discussion.”

⁴⁶ Interim Committee, “Report of a Discussion.”

⁴⁷ On the importance of indigenous languages in decolonisation, see Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind* (London: James Currey, 1986).

⁴⁸ UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, “Report of a Discussion on the Establishment of an Institute of African Studies,” 7 June 1960. Rado was a Hungarian-born economist. He was a member of the Executive Committee (1971–74) of the African Studies Association. His publications include “Notes towards a political economy of Ghana,” *African Affairs* 85, no. 341 (1986): 563–72. See webpage, https://prabook.com/web/emil_richard.rado/3490306, accessed 18 Dec. 2024.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Mahmood Mamdani, “Teaching Africa at the Post-Apartheid University of Cape Town: A Critical View of the ‘Introduction to Africa’ Core Course in the Social Science and Humanities Faculty's Foundation Semester, 1998,” *Social Dynamics* 24, no. 2 (1998): 1–32; Martin Hall, “Teaching Africa at the Post-Apartheid University of Cape Town: A Response,” *Social Dynamics* 24, no. 2 (1998): 40–62.

I know nothing of the political complications (University politics I mean) behind this but it does seem to me strange to start an Institute of African Studies without the assistance of economists, political scientists, comparative sociologists, (by which I mean anthropologists and sociologists together) and the like.⁵¹

Beyond the relative importance of some disciplines, these demands for widening the scope of the institute from a narrow institute focused on language to an all-encompassing one including other disciplines speak to the issue of decolonising the institute. This involves including types of knowledge or disciplines hitherto excluded from African Studies. As pointed out by Allman, typical colonial studies had focused on languages and hence bringing in other disciplines besides language highlighted oft-neglected but important aspects of African societies and cultures.

As Rado argued, and as Shinnie admitted, African Studies was already being carried out at the university even if there was no such named institute.⁵² This was buttressed by Kwabena Nketia, who stated that a journal of African Studies devoted to only languages and music would not reflect the spectrum of African Studies in the university and hence his suggestion for a bulletin with contributions from not only fellows of the institute.

Underpinning these debates was the relationship between the institute and other departments. Shinnie cautioned against competing with other departments. This position was supported by some colleagues. St. Clair Drake, then head of the Department of Sociology endorsed the proposed structure. As he argued, "I, too, think that it is important to so organise the Institute that it does not duplicate work now being done, but rather that its activities supplement current work, and break new ground which is not now a part of any department."⁵³

Others, however, proposed cooperation. Nketia for instance recommended that the institute should be one of interdisciplinary cooperation in African Studies. This meant that the teaching departments with interest in African Studies should be closely associated with the institute.⁵⁴ In addition, rather than the proposed committee for African Studies to oversee the affairs of the institute, he suggested a board of African Studies comprised of the heads of associated departments to whom the director of the institute will be responsible. Besides employing a fellow in Arabic and Islamic Studies, he further recommended an enlarged membership of the institute. This comprised associate membership for members from other departments working on research projects sponsored by the institute as well as members of a research organisation who were specialising in the field of African Studies sponsored by the university such as the West African linguistic survey. Members of the institute, St. Clair Drake added, should also be appointed as associate members of the teaching departments to teach related courses.

In the same vein, Curle made the case for a "symbiotic relationship between teaching and research."⁵⁵ He recommended teaching African languages at the undergraduate level. Regarding the structure of the institute, he advocated for one operating more as a coordinating body for projects by members of the college with not only a very limited permanent staff but one with the leader being the head of another department as well.

⁵¹ IAS, letter from Goody to Shinnie, 22 Dec. 1960. Goody was an English anthropologist who conducted extensive research in Ghana. Some of his works include *Death, Property and the Ancestors: A Study of the Mortuary Customs of the LoDagaa of West Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962) and *The Myth of the Bagre* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). See Royal Anthropological Institute, "Sir Jack Goody, F.B.A.," online obituary, <https://www.therai.org.uk/archives-and-manuscripts/obituaries/jack-goody>, accessed 20 Sep. 2024.

⁵² "Report of a Discussion on the Establishment of an Institute of African Studies," 7 June 1960; IAS, "Institute of African Studies," n.d. The document is signed with the initials M. S.

⁵³ IAS, St. Clair Drake, "Comments on Proposed Institute of African Studies at the University College of Ghana," 9 Nov. 1959.

⁵⁴ IAS, Nketia, "Comments on Proposed Institute of African Studies," n.d.

⁵⁵ IAS, Curle, "Notes on the Proposed Institute of African Studies, together with a comment on the Proposed Institute of Islamic Studies," n.d.

It is important to point out that many of the people involved had considerable stature in the early Africanist community — including Fage, Goody, Shinnie, Irwin, St. Clair Drake, Baeta, and Nketia — and cannot all be labelled as simply colonial stooges or accused of lack of interest in African knowledge and knowledge systems. This highlights the contestations within the Africanist community regarding decolonial project in the 1950s. However, some of Shinnie's arguments warrant further interrogation.

Shinnie raised the problems of finance and personnel to justify the “narrow” institute. In response to Rado's criticism, he claimed that,

We would all like all these activities to go on; it is, as he said, largely a question of money; we are, none of us unaware that the scope of the Institute, as at present envisaged, is rather narrow, but we believe that, as we say in Arabic, “Khatwa”, “Khatwa”. Let us not start off with some enormous thing that we cannot be sure we can finance indefinitely. Let us not set up an organisation which is immediately going to compete with all the valuable research going on in the departments.⁵⁶

Subsequently, in a letter to Thomas Hodgkin, Shinnie contended, “In abstract your scheme is an admirable one. But it does appear utopian in view of the financial and personnel limitations which are likely to obtain here and more suitable for a University in a foreign country than for one in Africa.”⁵⁷

While it is true that these discussions took place within limited finances at the university, prompting some to even suggest that the establishment of the institute be put on hold, Shinnie's comments about personnel suggests other concerns.⁵⁸ In one breath, he argues about lack of personnel whilst in another, he talks about competition with other departments. He admits that there were lecturers already doing African Studies in several departments; some of whom were even willing to be associated with the institute. For instance, Rado, an economist, presented a paper on “A Social Survey of Cape Coast Fishing” at the third annual conference of West African Institute of Social and Economic Research held from 22–25 March 1954.⁵⁹ Could his reluctance also have stemmed from trying to avoid burdening the IAS with cross-appointed faculty who were not interested or capable of doing African Studies as he imagined it should be, which raises the question of who is an Africanist? Or could it have been influenced by the colonial view of Africa as the “other,” if one considers his statement that a comprehensive African Studies was “more suitable for a university in a foreign country than for one in Africa”?⁶⁰ Nevertheless, his recruitment of Ivor Wilks, a historian, to the institute shows that he was not totally averse to a broad institute.

Another related decolonial subject besides the disciplinary focus was the geographical spread of what constituted “Africa” in African Studies. One member contributing to the debate on the nature of the institute asked, “does it tend to take in other parts of Africa beyond West Africa — will it be as all-embracing as S.O.A.S. in London (without the ‘O’).”⁶¹ Curle also noted,

It has been suggested that Government might be interested in financing a much bigger project which would be a major Institute of African Studies rather on the lines of the School of Oriental Studies and African Studies of London, omitting the “Oriental”. In this case the present Department of Archaeology, certain section of the Department of Sociology, some

⁵⁶“Report of a Discussion on the Establishment of an Institute of African Studies,” 7 June 1960.

⁵⁷IAS, letter from Shinnie to Thomas Hodgkin. The date of the letter is not clear on the document, but it looks like 9 Jan. 1961.

⁵⁸IAS, “Committee for African Studies, Minutes of the 1st Meeting, 3 May 1960”; IAS, “M. S.,” “Institute of African Studies.”

⁵⁹“Notes and News,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 24, no. 4 (1954): 379–80.

⁶⁰IAS, letter from Shinnie to Hodgkin.

⁶¹IAS, “M.S.,” “Institute of African Studies.”

other research activities of the College, together with African music, and African language and ethnology (not at present covered) should be brought into this organization.⁶²

The importance of the question of the geographical spread in decolonising African Studies is the tendency of Euro-American African Studies to confine Africa to what Zeleza calls the old Hegelian conception of “‘Africa’ as ‘sub-Saharan Africa,’ a racialized, some would even say racist, construction of ‘Africa’ that has haunted African studies in Euroamerica over the last century and which some of us have vigorously tried to deconstruct and dethrone.”⁶³ Thus, questions bordering on scope beyond Ghana or West Africa was an important deviation from the colonial rubric.

The objections to its narrow function notwithstanding, the committee’s proposal was endorsed due primarily to the argument about financial constraints. Shinnie was appointed as the first acting director of the Institute of African Studies on 15 October 1960.⁶⁴ The staff of the institute comprised the acting director (Shinnie), one senior research fellow (Nketia), and two research fellows in Akan languages and Northern Ghanaian languages, particularly Dagbani.⁶⁵ Between late 1960 and mid-1961, Shinnie was busy recruiting a substantive director for the institute and additional staff.⁶⁶ The position of a director was put on hold because of the presidential directive on the freeze on appointing staff at the professorial level. Shinnie was asked to act until an appointment was made.⁶⁷

Phase three: 1960–63

The third phase of the development of IAS commenced in December 1960 — that is, after the establishment of the institute in the second phase.⁶⁸ It has its origins in the establishment of the Commission on University Education (December 1960 – January 1961) to advise the government on transforming UCGC and Kumasi College of Technology (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology or KNUST) to full university status.⁶⁹

The commission — in its published report dated 1 May 1961 — recommended the establishment of an Institute of Africa Studies. Indeed, a whole appendix was devoted to this subject, showing the importance it attached to such an institute. However, besides a passing reference to the appointment of a musicologist to staff the institute, it failed to acknowledge the existence of such an institute at UCGC and the debates leading to its establishment. It thus presents the erroneous impression that IAS was a new project. Its recommendations for the institute, however, diverged in many ways from the existing one.

⁶²There’s a handwritten note stating “Curle’s views.” IAS, “M.S.,” “Institute of African Studies.”

⁶³Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “Reconceptualizing African Diasporas: Notes from a Historian,” *Transforming Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (2010): 76.

⁶⁴UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, letter from R. H. Stoughton to Shinnie, 15 Oct. 1960.

⁶⁵Five research fellows were requested by the committee but only two could be catered for due to finances. The two research fellows were to start at the beginning of the Michaelmas term, 1961. See presumably a draft advertisement for positions at the institute, UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, letter from Shinnie to Registrar, 10 Mar. 1961.

⁶⁶UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, letter from Shinnie to Registrar, 10 Nov. 1960; UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, letter from Shinnie to Registrar, 16 Nov. 1960; UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, letter from Shinnie to Principal, University College of Ghana, 18 Jan. 1961; UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, letter from to Registrar, 10 Mar. 1961.

⁶⁷UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, letter from Registrar to Shinnie, 20 May 1961.

⁶⁸It is important to state that at least by May 1961, Shinnie, serving as acting director was signing letters on an Institute of African Studies letterhead.

⁶⁹The commission comprised Kojo Botsio, Minister of Agriculture (Chairman); D. A. Chapman, Headmaster, Achimota School; J. D. Bernal, Professor of Physics, Birkbeck College, University of London; H. M. Bond, Dean of the School of Education, University of Atlanta; Miss L. A. Bornholdt, Dean of Women and Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford; D. S. H. W. Nicol, Principal, University College, Sierra Leone; D. Skilbeck, Principal, Wye College, University of London; N. S. Torochesnikov, Professor of Inorganic Chemical Technology, Mendeleyev Institute, Moscow; Nana Kobina Nketsia IV, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Secretary); T. L. Hodgkin, Research Fellow, McGill University (Secretary); D. D. Carmichael, Scholarship Secretariat (Administrative Secretary).

The commission in its report recommended that:

Research and teaching in the field of African Studies should be closely associated, stimulating and reinforcing one another. Within the Universities there should be a balance between those whose primary interest is research and those primarily concerned with teaching. The main focus of research and post-graduate teaching should be the Institute of African Studies. The Institute should take an active interest in the whole range of African Studies (as defined above), though there will necessarily be practical limitations on the provision which can be made for research and teaching in particular sectors.⁷⁰

Shinnie was critical of the report of the committee. As noted above, it failed to acknowledge the alternate visions of the institute and the debates leading to its establishment. Shinnie therefore has a point when he wrote to Hodgkin, the joint secretary to the commission, that “No one reading your document would have any inkling that African studies has been pursued here for many years and that there has been continual and passionate debate as to how to further them.”⁷¹

The report of the committee was accepted by the government in a white paper in 1961 and culminated in the establishment of an overhauled IAS in the same year. Hodgkin was appointed the director in 1961 and took office in June 1962.⁷² The main programmes advertised for its 1962–63 academic year were a two-year course leading to an MA in African Studies and two diploma programs — a post-graduate diploma in African archaeology in the Department of Archaeology and a diploma in African music, in the Music and Arts Division of the Institute of African Studies.⁷³ The institute admitted its first batch of students in 1962. They numbered eleven graduate students made up of five Ghanaians and six non-Ghanaians. For the Diploma in Music, there were four students.⁷⁴ There were no students for the Diploma in Archaeology.⁷⁵ The institute was formally opened by President Nkrumah on 25 October 1963.⁷⁶

It is evident from the above that between 1948–63 there were complementary and/or conflicting ideas regarding the nature of the institute, which highlight the complexity of decolonial ideas in circulation. The next section examines how Nkrumah’s Afroepistemic approach diverged from or intersected with imperial knowledge framings.

Nkrumah and an Afroepistemic African Studies

Defining and pursuing decolonial work is vexed by the problem of understanding what is being pursued, as the above section shows. Adam Branch rightly notes that “Given African Studies’ many histories and geographies, what decolonisation means will also differ, entailing different temporalities, transformations and dilemmas.”⁷⁷ Christopher Clapham also points out that it is “a diverse and

⁷⁰ Commission on University Education, *Report of the Commission on University Education, December 1960–January 1961* (Accra: Ministry of Information, 1961), 33.

⁷¹ IAS, letter from Shinnie to Hodgkin, 9 Jan. 1961 (see n57).

⁷² IAS, letter from Hodgkin to Vice-Chancellor Conor Cruise O’Brien, 4 Apr. 1964. According to Allman, Shinnie suggests in his memoir that he was replaced by Hodgkin as director through the “direct intervention of President Nkrumah.” See Allman, “Kwame Nkrumah,” 189. This is problematic, however, because, Shinnie was no longer the acting director by the time Hodgkin was appointed. In Sep. 1961, J. H. Nketia was appointed as acting director until a director was appointed. Interestingly, Shinnie had written to be relieved of his post as his appointment had passed the agreed year although he stated would not mind continuing if he was still needed: see UG, UG1/3/2/3/78, letter from Shinnie to the Secretary, General Board, 23 May 1961.

⁷³ IAS, “MA in African Studies at the University of Ghana,” n.d.

⁷⁴ IAS, “Future Plans for the Institute of African Studies (Provisional),” n.d.; IAS, Thomas Hodgkin, “Institute of African Studies,” n.d.; IAS, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, “A Brief Report for the Year Oct. 1962–Sep. 1963,” n.d.

⁷⁵ IAS, University of Ghana. Institute of African Studies, “Organisation and Scope of African Studies,” n.d.

⁷⁶ Nkrumah, “*The African Genius*.”

⁷⁷ Adam Branch, “Decolonising the African Studies Centre,” *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 36, no. 2 (2018): 74.

confusing range of claims that it becomes difficult to disentangle what decolonising African studies actually means, and what it is expected to achieve.”⁷⁸

This paper draws on Shose Kessi, Zoe Marks, and Elelwani Ramugondo’s definition of decolonising, which encapsulates ideas propounded by many of the leading scholars in the field, to tease out Nkrumah’s Afroepistemic approach.⁷⁹ Decolonising, according to them, is “a verb that entails a political and normative ethic and practice of resistance and intentional undoing — unlearning and dismantling unjust practices, assumptions, and institutions — as well as persistent positive action to create and build alternative spaces and ways of knowing.”⁸⁰

Building on this definition, this paper approaches Nkrumah’s intervention from the following perspectives: What is African Studies? What is its geographical breadth, disciplinary width, and historical depth? How did the definition of African Studies, and the institutional foundation and curriculum of IAS, capture the decolonial ethos? These questions are important for understanding how the IAS of the third phase diverged from or intersected with that of the earlier phases.

African Studies

What constitutes African Studies was the subject of debates and conflicts at the time of the establishment of the institute — particularly in the second phase, as noted above. The early discussions focused on disciplinary issues which, while important, did not address underlying epistemological issues. Nkrumah waded into this debate by repurposing African Studies. A product of Achimota College in the 1920s — the heyday of Guggisberg’s cultural project — Nkrumah was likely familiar with “colonial” African Studies. Charging fellows at the formal opening of the revamped IAS to move away from the “colonial studies” of Africa, he noted,

One essential function of this Institute must surely be to study the history, culture and institutions, languages and arts of Ghana and of Africa in new African centred ways — in entire freedom from the propositions and pre-suppositions of the colonial epoch, and from the distortions of those Professors and Lecturers who continue to make European studies of Africa the basis of this new assessment. By the work of this Institute, we must re-assess and assert the glories and achievements of our African past and inspire our generation, and succeeding generations, with a vision of a better future.⁸¹

Nkrumah was echoing Blyden’s charge of about six decades earlier that the inability of foreign teachers to transcend their European boundaries and use their European standards as the measurement of African ways of life was responsible for holding back the progress of Africans.⁸² African Studies developed in the West, as Nkrumah pointed out, was influenced by colonial ideologies that held African peoples as inferior human species.⁸³ He was thus clear about the emancipatory role of education and African Studies in particular. As he noted in his speech at the opening of the First International Congress of Africanists, the system of education introduced by the Europeans

⁷⁸ Christopher Clapham, “Decolonising African Studies?” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 58, no. 1 (2020): 138.

⁷⁹ Mamdani, “Between the Public Intellectual”; Toyin Falola, *Decolonising African Knowledge: Autoethnography and African Epistemologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Achille Joseph Mbembe, “Decolonising the University: New Directions,” *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 29–45; Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “The Cognitive Empire, Politics of Knowledge and African Intellectual Productions: Reflections on Struggles for Epistemic Freedom and Resurgence of Decolonisation in The Twenty-First Century,” *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 5 (2021): 882–901; Zeleza, “African Studies.”

⁸⁰ Shose Kessi, Zoe Marks, and Elelwani Ramugondo, “Decolonizing African Studies,” *Critical African Studies* 12, no. 3 (2020): 271.

⁸¹ Nkrumah, “*The African Genius*,” 3.

⁸² Blyden, “The African Society,” 14.

⁸³ Nkrumah, “*The African Genius*,” 2.

had put Africans in a subordinate position to Europe and everything European because it was designed to alienate Africans from their ways of life, knowledge and skills discovered by their forefathers.⁸⁴ This demanded a reinterpretation of the African past, an Afroepistemic approach, to correct the epistemic injustice of privileging non-African, and particularly Euro-American, perspectives.

The African Studies Nkrumah proposed was an affirmation of the validity of Africa and its knowledge systems, which challenged Eurocentric views such as that of Trevor-Roper's infamous statement on Africa having no history. This, Paulin J. Hountondji affirms, is driven by questions relevant to the African predicament posed by Africans structured on African knowledge systems.⁸⁵ The task of the institute was, therefore, to eradicate the "colonial mentality which our contact with Europe had induced in us and rediscover ourselves with confidence and a distinct world outlook."⁸⁶ Nkrumah, like Blyden before him, wanted the institute to develop an African scholar who was in tune with their history and culture.⁸⁷

Another decolonial conceptualisation of African Studies by Nkrumah was the spatial dimension of Africa. Nkrumah conceived of Africa, not in the narrow geographical sense of Africa south of the Sahara or "Black Africa" nor only continental Africa. He stated,

I would hope this Institute would always conceive its function as being to study *Africa*, in the widest possible sense — Africa in all its complexity and diversity, and its underlying unity... This is essentially an Institute of *African Studies*, not of *Ghana Studies*, nor of *West African Studies*.⁸⁸

He noted regarding the African diaspora,

Your work must also include a study of the origins and culture of peoples of African descent in the Americas and the Caribbean, and you should seek to maintain close relations with their scholars so that there may be cross fertilisation between Africa and those who have their roots in the African past.⁸⁹

This view of Africa challenged the colonial notion that Africa constituted sub-Saharan Africa. As Mamdani puts it "The idea that Africa is spatially synonymous with equatorial Africa, and socially with Bantu Africa, is an idea produced and spread in the context of colonialism and apartheid."⁹⁰

Nkrumah's views were influenced by Pan-Africanism which not only acknowledged the historic and familial relations between the continent and its diasporas but also held that the unification of Africans on the continent and those in the diaspora was key to the emancipation of Africa and its

⁸⁴Kwame Nkrumah, "Address Delivered to Mark the Opening of the First International Congress of Africanists on 12 December 1962," in *The Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists, Accra 11th–18th December 1962*, eds. Lalage Bown and Michael Crowder (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 10.

⁸⁵Paulin J. Hountondji, "Knowledge of Africa, Knowledge by Africans: Two Perspectives on African Studies," *RCCS Annual Review* 1 (2009): 121.

⁸⁶Kwame Nkrumah, "'Flower of Learning,' Speech by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, President of the Republic of Ghana, at his Installation as First Chancellor of the University of Ghana, during the inauguration of the University on Saturday, 25 November 1961," 7, *Nkrumah.net* website, <https://www.nkrumah.net/gov-pubs/gp-a1010-61-62/gen.php?index=2>, accessed 8 Nov. 2023.

⁸⁷Deborah Shapelle Spillman, "African Skin, Victorian Masks: The Object Lessons of Mary Kingsley and Edward Blyden," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39, no. 2 (2011): 315.

⁸⁸Nkrumah, "The African Genius," 9. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁰Mamdani, "Between the Public Intellectual."

peoples.⁹¹ This Pan-Africanist vision was contained in his position on the instrumental role of the university in the “achievement of African unity.”⁹²

It is worth noting that this conception of Africa to include the diaspora was absent in the debates regarding African Studies in the earlier phases. Interestingly the Commission on University Education noted in its report that the “geographical range of African studies could be in three widening circles of interest – Ghanaian studies, West African Studies, general African Studies.”⁹³ Thus while the commission was instrumental in the reorganisation of the institute of the third phase, clearly not all the ideas emanated from it. Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanist vision shaped the new institute.

Curriculum

The related matter of disciplinary emphasis at the institute engaged other scholars, as discussed in the second phase. As noted earlier, Busia also intimated that the scope in the first phase may even have been wider than what was established in the second phase. Nkrumah too was not oblivious of the importance of the wide-ranging disciplines. He widened the scope from languages to encompass others as well.

The courses on offer, when the institute commenced in the third phase, showed its broad disciplinary fields as well as geographical spread. Africa was seen as a legitimate space of knowledge production that could be studied from different disciplinary perspectives. Indeed, students could specialise in any of four areas: language; history; sociology, economics, and politics; and music.⁹⁴ Language courses included Arabic, Hausa, Mandinka, Dagbani, Ga-Adangme, Twi-Fante, Ewe, and Introduction to African Linguistics. The history focus offered classes on Western Sudan, Ghana, the history and archaeology of the Nile Valley before the coming of Islam, French-speaking West Africa, African archaeology, and geographical dynamics of West African History. Courses in the sociology, politics, and economics focus included: Industrialisation and Social Change in Modern Africa and Structure of West African Societies, African Political Systems — precolonial and modern periods, African National Movements – a comparative approach, Problems of Economic Development in West Africa, and Introduction to African Ethical, Political, and Metaphysical Ideas. The music specialisation included an Introduction to West African Music and studies in various vocal and instrumental forms.

It is evident from the above that Nkrumah — unlike Shinnie — thought that an all-encompassing institute was a fit for Ghana. Also, unlike Rado, Nkrumah did not think of languages as trivial, as seen in the diverse courses on offer. Like other Pan-Africanists before him, such as Blyden and Casely Hayford, Nkrumah recognised the importance of studying African languages. However, as he argued, there was a need for a radical shift in how these languages were taught as it “was closely related to the practical objectives of the European missionary and the administrator.”⁹⁵

He further recognised the limitation of the colonial language, English. Thus, while reminding fellows of “the urgent need to search for, edit, publish and make available sources of all kinds” he was acutely aware of the shortcomings of written documents, particularly in a largely oral culture with low literacy in English.⁹⁶ He therefore demanded that,

⁹¹ P. O. Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776–1991* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1994); Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965); Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963); Marika Sherwood and Hakim Adi, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁹² Nkrumah, “Flower of Learning,” 3.

⁹³ Commission on University Education, *Report*, 33.

⁹⁴ IAS, “MA in African Studies.”

⁹⁵ Nkrumah, “*The African Genius*,” 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

In addition to publishing the results of its research in a form in which it will be available in scholars, the Institute must be concerned with its diffusion in a more popular form among a much wider public. While there are many channels through which this new learning can be spread — including radio and, in the very near future, television.⁹⁷

This was an attempt to decolonise access to knowledge by democratising knowledge dissemination to make it available and accessible to others outside the academy. This was important to challenge the colonial notion that Africa had no intelligentsia who could observe, record, analyse, interpret, and communicate their findings intellectually.

Institutional

The third thorny question of the structure of the institute, particularly its relationship with other departments, did not escape Nkrumah's attention. Nkrumah took these ideas a notch further: the institute was to become the pivot of the university. He granted it status as the first semi-autonomous institution at UG, with its budget flowing directly from the National Council of Higher Education.⁹⁸ It was envisioned to be the centre of research and graduate teaching at UG. To emphasise this symbolically, the institute's building was placed right at the entrance of the university. This special position was clearly stated at the official opening of the institute thus, "When we were planning this University, I knew that a many-sided Institute of African Studies which should fertilise the University, and through the University, the Nation, was a vital part of it."⁹⁹

The institute was to work closely with teaching departments not only at UG but also at KNUST. At the undergraduate level, African Studies was made a compulsory university course.¹⁰⁰ The institute's mandate did not end at the university level: it was also to be engaged in the production of textbooks for other institutions such as training colleges, secondary schools, workers' colleges, and other educational institutions.¹⁰¹

Nonetheless, for all elements of the Afroepistemic ideal that the institute propounded, not all were fulfilled. For instance, not all subjects could be taught in geographic or historical depth because of the number of staff with limited specialisations. Nkrumah also championed the study of French, another "colonial language" which the commission recommended should be obligatory for all students. But as wa Thiong'o points out, while Nkrumah recognised the importance of local languages, he was also cognizant of the position of the colonial languages and hence did not call for "linguistic self-isolation."¹⁰² He was, obviously, a man of his time, and these times both inspired and limited what he could accomplish. Some of these limitations — such as limited personnel and the reliance on external partners — were acknowledged in the white paper as well as his inaugural chancellor's speech.¹⁰³

The institutional history of IAS presented above shows that the efforts of Busia, Fage, Baeta, Nketia, Drake, Curle, Rado, Goody, Shinnie, and others were, in some respects, steps forward in decolonial terms and foreshadowed what Nkrumah would empower in 1963. However, compared directly against the colonial-era legacy and late colonial Africanist project evident in the less-than-adequate programme entrenched in the 1959 report and the IAS as established in 1960 he had to engage, Nkrumah's new IAS more firmly separated the IAS from the colonial paradigm.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

⁹⁸ Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Accra, RG3/6/57, National Council for Higher Education, Secretariat for Higher Education and Research, "Progress Report on Implementation of the Report of the Commission on University Education, 1962."

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Agbodeka, *History of University of Ghana*, 126, 169.

¹⁰¹ Nkrumah, "The African Genius," 9.

¹⁰² Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "African languages – Lifting the mask of invisibility," *University World News*, 10 Mar. 2017, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20170307102246629>, accessed 17 Nov. 2023.

¹⁰³ Commission on University Education, *Report*; Nkrumah, "Flower of Learning."

Conclusion

The paper examined the origins of the IAS at UG within a decolonial framework. It interrogated the various stages and debates regarding the form and nature of the institute to properly contextualise Nkrumah's role in decolonising African Studies. It identified three phases — phase one (1948–50), phase two (1954–61), and phase three (1960–63) — in the origins and establishment of the institute that show the complex decolonial landscape that spanned pre-1948 to 1961 and was characterised by shades of decolonial ideas. It further showed the alternate visions that characterised these periods — that is, a narrow versus an all-encompassing institute.

The third phase, under Nkrumah's leadership, demonstrates that a major leap was taken to free African Studies from colonial thinking. It was during this period that a more encompassing institute was established to decolonise African knowledge beyond the narrow focus on African languages. Significantly, the new focus was on how these disciplines were to be approached and disseminated. It was Afroepistemic in its challenge to Eurocentric views of Africa and modes of knowledge production and dissemination about Africa. Furthermore, Nkrumah's vision of the institute was not only at the level of rhetoric, but he provided financial and institutional support to help establish it in 1961. Finally, rather than being at the margins, he placed it at the centre of university education. While the Afroepistemic ideal was not fully realised, Nkrumah took African Studies from the “periphery” as established under the second phase to the centre in the third phase of the institute's history.

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