

THE MYTH OF THE BIG SIX AND THE REAL FOUNDER'S DAY

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SALUTATIONS

Fellow Comrades:

I am very happy to see as Chairwoman for today's celebration, my senior academic, Professor Akua Britwum. She and I conducted a joint research project some 20 years ago. I have admired her beautiful mind and her work ethic since then.

I am also glad to share the podium today with Kwesi Pratt Junior, a Comrade who has sacrificed the better part of his life in search of social justice and who is not afraid to speak up when he must, a quality that is getting consistently diminished in our Republic, as the days go by.

SUMMARY OF MY LECTURE TODAY

I would like to communicate just three things in my lecture today.

First, the topic you have asked me to speak on is self-answered; the answers are within the question, a clear indication that you expect me to speak about something else.

Second, the reason why we are quarrelling today about the myth of the Big Six and the Real Founder of the Nation is that, as comrades, we have refused to learn from our leader, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who did not only **do**, but **scripted** what he did, for posterity.

The third and last point I would like to make today is on the Apartheid of Knowledge Production and Epistemic Violence in the world we live in today, and what comrades may do about it.

THE MYTH OF THE BIG SIX AND THE REAL FOUNDER'S DAY

As I have just noted, your topic is self-answering. “The Myth of the Big Six” means exactly that; the big six is a Myth. And the “Real Founder’s Day” means that today is the Real Founder’s Day, and that, as the expression is used in the singular, there is only one Founder and not many founders.

It is true that there were many persons and organisations that contributed to the independence struggle. From Nkrumah; through the Big Six, chiefs, central figures in business and lawyers; to ex-service men, market women and veranda boys, each playing very unique and important roles in the struggle. And we have not forgotten them. That is why we celebrate them on Independence Day every single year.

Founder’s Day, however, must be reserved for the African of the 20th Century, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Full Stop.

This totally needless and backward-looking debate was instigated by the current government as part of a contrivance to privilege the roles of the relatives of the two most politically powerful persons in Ghana today. So, President Akufo-Addo wants Edward Akufo-Addo made a founder of Ghana. And Hon. Ken Ofori-Atta wants William Ofori Atta made a founder of Ghana.

Whilst it is noble to honour our parents and uncles and aunties, we must, as leaders, always be conscious about the lines between the public and the private. Private honour should never be forced to transcend into the public space, whether it be in the determination of who the Founder of the nation is, or in building a cathedral. This nauseating blend of the public and the private, where the resources of the nation and the history of the nation are privatized is as dirty as it is dangerous.

J. B. Danquah’s role in the independence struggle is commendable, even if dimmed by his interesting relationship with the CIA. Any proper law student who has read Danquah’s submissions in the Re Akoto case knows that he was a real legal luminary. These need to be celebrated. That is why I support a Danquah Circle in one of the choiciest parts of Accra, Osu. This appropriate honor is of a public character and is a noble thing to do. What is inappropriate is for politicians, whilst they are in office, to generate and whip up a grandiose imaginary of the

contributions to national development of your relatives, turn this into a huge NATIONAL agenda and proceed to exaggerate their place in our history.

Public honour does not preclude private acts of honor. A private Danquah Institute is a very commendable idea. It is something I will support any day. However, translating and mapping the Danquah Institute unto our national security apparatus, is as dangerous as it is naïve. In my past life, and over a certain period, I had the honour of interacting with the best of Ghana's national security apparatus, almost on a daily basis. I learnt many things over that time. One thing I learnt was that the best national security chiefs are those who are able to provide to the President a summation of the national security situation, an indication of the internal and external security threats, and recommendations as to how to address them; offering these to the President in their stark and profound reality, even to the discomfort of the President. They would then, on some issues, seek the pleasure of the President and act accordingly. The best of them would advise the President on the effects of his directions, good or bad, and where the President is completely off, nudge him closer to reason. The point I am struggling to make is this: if we take the Minister for National Security out of the equation, the Danquah Institute National Security we have now cannot secure the nation, especially as we go into what is going to be the most keenly contested Presidential and Parliamentary election in a little over 2 years.

To conclude on this first point about the Myth of the Big Six and the Real Founder's Day, let me say something about the Big Six. There was no Big Six. The Six never saw themselves as a Unit and they did not act as a Unit. Indeed, when the temperature became hot, the members of the Big Six often turned against one another in a fashion that eliminated any chances for unitary, consolidated action of the sort that could create a Big Six.

A deep reading of the Watson Commission Report reveals that the other five blamed Nkrumah for the events leading up to their arrest and disapproved of the plan of action he developed, circulated, activated, and monitored for the immediate achievement of self-rule for Ghana. The question I ask is this: how can you expect to be honored for the independence of Ghana in 1957 when you did not want that independence to happen at that time?

Indeed, any critical reader of our history will note that the term “The Big Six” was a result of the failure of British Intelligence in Ghana of the time, which we now know, was horrendously weak. All they did was to arrest the leaders of the UGCC party at the time, a result of really lazy intelligence gathering and processing. The idea of “The Big Six”, as it is promoted today for political purposes, is a really suspect political category. We cannot, as a proud nation, recreate as part of our essential history, the output of sloppy British intelligence. The Big Six has always been a myth and we should let it remain that way.

And so, the summary of the first point I wish to convey today is this:

1. **ONE:** Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah is a leading light in the world and in Africa, a consistent Pan Africanist and Nationalist, who the vast majority of Ghanaian verily believe is the Founder of their nation and who should be celebrated on Founder’s Day.
2. **TWO:** There is no Founders’ Day, because, all the other important persons who contributed to our independence, including those who did not want independence for us as early as 1957, are celebrated on Independence Day. They include the illustrious Dr. J. B. Danquah, who should not be overly depreciated for his role with the CIA and in the Kyebi Ritual Murder Case, although we should not set out to put him on the same pedestal as Nkrumah.
3. **THREE:** The Debate over “The Big Six” and the “Real Founder’s Day” is really a sterile one, a backward-looking debate that should be substituted for something more forward looking and productive. Sixty-five years after independence we should not be debating who the Founder of the Nation is. We should not be mis-writing our history to favour personal and clannish agendas. We should be focusing on why there is such a paucity of knowledge infrastructure and knowledge resources, such that this issue has become an issue at all.

DOING AND SCRIPTING WHAT WE DO

The second point I wish to make at this lecture is this: As comrades, we have in the last 65 years, focused on doing, on activity; without devoting enough attention to scripting who we are, what we have done, what we are doing, and what we will do.

If we had the ready knowledge infrastructure and knowledge resources that ensure that the true character of the many issues that we debate in Ghana today are laid bare, many of the issues we spend time and energy on would be revealed for what they truly are: non-issues.

We have witnessed the propagandists of various presidents after 1966, compare them to Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, without any trepidation, some being brave enough to put them on the same pedestal. This would not happen if comrades were to take their time to script the reality of each of these presidents against the everlasting standard that Nkrumah set in all spheres of our national endeavour.

What is particularly painful for me is that Nkrumah was himself a scripter. First, there were his books; philosophical, deep, reflective, forward-looking, prophetic, and action-oriented. For those who have not realized it, it is not easy to be at once philosophical and action-oriented in the same piece of writing or at all.

Beyond his books and papers, there were his speeches, each crafted for the occasion and each taking you to school in terms of the amount of data, knowledge, policy planning, and more that they contained. I will recommend to you his speeches at the inauguration of the Akosombo Dam, at the Inauguration of the Atomic Energy Commission at Kwabenya, which I believe carried his vision for making Ghana and Africa a nuclear power, and his speech at the opening of the Ghana School of Law, and in particular, his articulation therein of his vision for a really Afrocentric system of legal education.

Comrades do not collate these writings in easily accessible forms; they do not actively and strategically popularize them, including through electronic popularization; they do not keep these writings and scripts alive in policy, intellectual and academic scholarship and debates; and they do not invest in

comparative analyses of these with later events, especially those that seek to re-write history in terms that are favourable to individual persons, their families and their clans.

Resultantly, we have a lot of nonsense on Wikipedia and in the textbooks that are used to teach our children, that pass for the history of Ghana. Let me illustrate this point with two examples. First, consistently, and in the last several years, new material on the Founders' Day is being submitted to Wikipedia. If less doctored accounts of these submissions were also available, and due to the safeguards that Wikipedia has put in place to verify information, the doctored accounts will not have the field day that they currently have. Securing such changes to that universal dictionary, Wikipedia, is one sure way to diminish the role of Nkrumah as Founder of Ghana.

My second example is more dated. It relates to the bastardization of Nkrumah following his overthrow as President. The unkind accounts of his tenure as President, by scholars such as T.O. Omari and even Prof. Adu Boahen have become the history of Ghana. They said, for example, that Nkrumah gave himself power to legislate over and above the legislature, but forgot to add that Nkrumah never used that power, even once. Kinder accounts of Nkrumah's tenure as President have consistently been kept under the bushel. Again, comparative analyses are missing.

The National Liberation Council, which overthrew Nkrumah, appeared far more dictatorial than Nkrumah who they labelled as dictatorial and deserving of overthrow. They accused Nkrumah of illiberal tendencies, but went ahead to pass the National Liberation Council (Prohibition of Rumours) Decree, 1966 (NLCD 92), issued in the very year they took power, authorizing 28 days of detention without trial and up to three years in prison for journalists who might "cause alarm and despondency", "disturb the public peace", or "cause disaffection against the N.L.C". They accused Nkrumah of banning political parties, but went ahead to ban the CPP. Everything they accused Nkrumah of doing, they did in some measure. When will comrades do a thorough analyses of these regimes so that we can all be better informed about our true history.

Whilst the NLC and the Progress Party (PP) were very anti-Nkrumah, there were many post PP governments that were either pro-Nkrumah or Nkrumah-neutral,

and comrades have no excuse for not producing knowledge resources for our authentic history during those periods.

To conclude on this second point, if you do not script what you do, anyone, any day, can re-script history to honour their fathers and uncles in ways that are not as deserving as they make it to be. It is enough to run a clannish economy. It is asking too much to rewrite our history in favour of that Clan. Take the dirty money and go; but leave our history for us.

APARTHEID OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

Flowing from the second point I have just made is the third and last point I seek to make today. There is a certain apartheid in knowledge production and epistemic violence that consigns the indigenous production of historical knowledge to second place, and behind Euro-American accounts of it.

The physical location and relocation of historical material about Ghana in the British Archives and in CIA storage rooms in Langley, coinciding with the politics and economics of research funding, have ensured that the majority and the most popular and recognized scholars about the history of Ghana are expatriates. We are quite behind in the infrastructure for producing local knowledge, including oral history research and knowledge resources based here in Ghana.

We need to break the trend immediately. If you read books like “A Dam for Africa”, on the Akosombo Dam by Stephan Miescher, it is clear that a creative use of the knowledge resources that cannot be physically taken away would stem the tide of apartheid in knowledge production and epistemic violence. Indigenous Knowledge, oral histories, archeological excavations (as is happening at the site of the Osu Castle) are all sources of unique local knowledge that are available for comrades for keeping the true history of this nation intact, evolving only in accordance with evidence-based research.

Epistemic violence, is a primary measure for any system of domination. Domination is not accomplished only by military might, physical repression, and

economic exploitation. It is executed also, as Enrique Galván-Álvarez has told us, “most importantly through the construction of epistemic frameworks that legitimise and enshrine those practices of domination.” Andrew Norman prompts us that: “Of course, the phenomenon in question would not ordinarily be thought of as violence: it is too respectable, too academic, too genteel for that. It is violence all the same, and deserves to be seen for what it is.” Anyone who has a problem imagining Epistemic Violence should read Festus Iyayi’s “Violence”, a chronicle of Economic and Social violence in Nigeria.

Unless we overcome Epistemic Violence, which forcefully delegitimizes, represses and sanctions our methods of enquiry; our ways of knowing; our mechanisms for generating, storing and utilizing knowledge; and disallow the continuing enforcement of only other possibilities of knowing, we will never know ourselves, and can never be what we seek and yearn to be as a Nation.

CONCLUSION

I would like to end this brief lecture with the words of our national anthem. Sometimes, words become so familiar, so hackneyed, that we just mumble them as mundane verbiage, not paying attention to the sublime values and calls to action that inspired and still undergird them.

For today, I wish for us to pay attention to those everlasting words of our national anthem, and I respectfully call on all of us to rise, as we slowly recite those words, according to a pace that I will set:

God bless our homeland Ghana,

Emphasis is on GOD and HOMELAND

And make our nation great and strong,

Emphasis is on GREAT and STRONG

Bold to defend for ever,

BOLD, DEFEND, FOREVER

The cause of Freedom and of Right.

FREEDOM, RIGHT

Fill our hearts with true humility

HUMILITY

Make us cherish fearless honesty,

FEARLESS, HONESTY

And help us to resist oppressor's rule

RESIST, OPPRESSOR

With all our will and might for evermore.

WILL, MIGHT, FOREVER

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION