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**Title**

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**Journal**

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 23(1)

**ISSN**

0041-5715

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**Publication Date**

1995

**DOI**

10.5070/F7231016701

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C.L.R. JAMES AND RICHARD WRIGHT:  
ON GHANA, NKRUMAHISM, AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Hussein M. Adam

I. Introduction

Within the Pan-African imagination, Ethiopia and Ghana have loomed large: Ethiopia as a biblical-era African kingdom; Ghana as the first black African colony to gain political independence in 1957.<sup>1</sup> Ghana's charismatic leader, the Pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah, played a crucial role in enhancing Ghana's image among Pan-Africanists around the world. At least two Pan-African figures—both with a Marxist background—wrote books reflecting on the Ghana experience and Nkrumah's role. This article compares and contrasts their perspectives on Ghana and Nkrumah. Such an analysis allows a revisit to issues of decolonization, modernization, and democratization in order to obtain a useful historical as well as comparative perspective. To be more specific, this analysis examines their works from the perspective of the contemporary preoccupation with "state and civil society in crisis." To what extent were they aware of the compatibility between Ghana's civil society and the post-colonial Nkrumahist state? In all attempts to transform society, we must recall that the past is always with us. An understanding of what went wrong in the past is indispensable to the search for solutions to the present predicament. Ghana exercised considerable influence, continent-wide, both as a model of non-violent anti-colonial struggles and as a model of a dynamic, nonaligned, post-colonial State. This comparison will not only reveal insights into Ghana and Nkrumah, but will also shed light on the then prevailing perspectives, including those of the two authors concerned. An attempt will also be made to place these books into the African Studies paradigms of the last forty years.

Very soon after the achievement of Africa's political independence in the sixties and up to recent years, the literature on African politics has been resolutely bleak with an overwhelming emphasis on dictatorship and various forms of authoritarianism. This is what political scientist Richard Sklar referred to as the "Developmental Dictatorship" paradigm, that dominated African political studies for at least three decades. Proponents generally assumed that democracy (embodying choice and competition within a constitutional framework, rotation of leaders, rule of law) is not a viable form of politics in Africa and is largely irrelevant in a continent dominated by the authoritarianism

of single-party and military rule. As the following analysis indicates, Richard Wright's writings on Ghana support this "Developmental Dictatorship" perspective. C.L.R. James (joining a handful of pioneers like Frantz Fanon, Dunduzu Chisize, and Sir Arthur Lewis) argues for what Sklar referred to as a "Developmental Democracy" paradigm. These pro-democracy pioneers argued that the single party/military rule dictatorship perspective was not only unduly pessimistic but also at odds with the realities of African civil societies. James saw Ghana's democracy emerge as a nationalist challenge to colonial authoritarianism, only to be frustrated and distorted by Nkrumahism. James' and Wright's writings on Ghana are useful to stimulate current debates and reforms around the issue of democratization in the Third World in general and Africa in particular.<sup>2</sup>

James, a famous Marxist, Pan-Africanist scholar/activist, wrote his book over a twenty year period. He finally published it in 1977 as *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*;<sup>3</sup> novelist Richard Wright's main writings on Ghana include the book *Black Power* (1954) and the chapter, "The Miracle of Nationalism in the African Gold Coast" in *White Man, Listen!*<sup>4</sup> James' role in Pan-African struggles includes the influence he was able to exert on a number of individuals who, later on, were fortunate enough to have led struggles in various parts of the world. One of these was his own Trinidadian classmate, George Padmore, who went on to become Nkrumah's adviser on African affairs. The other was Nkrumah himself. While studying in the United States, Nkrumah wrote: "I made time to acquaint myself with as many political organizations as I could. These included the Republicans, the Democrats, the Communists, and the Trotskyites. It was in connection with the last movement that I met one of its leading members, Mr. C.L.R. James, and through him I learned how an underground movement worked."<sup>5</sup> In 1957, James visited Ghana, where he held long conversations with Nkrumah and his old compatriot, Padmore. He revisited Ghana in 1960 where he paid tribute to Nkrumah and his party in a speech (included within the book) before Nkrumah's political organization, the Convention People's Party (CPP). It was James who introduced Nkrumah to Padmore who, in turn, introduced Wright to Nkrumah. Mr. and Mrs. Padmore helped secure a formal invitation from Prime Minister Nkrumah to allow Wright to visit Ghana.<sup>6</sup> Wright spent several months in 1953 in Accra and visited regional centers including Kumasi, collecting information for *Black Power*. Apart from commenting on issues of African governance, Wright also expressed interest in the relationships between African Americans and Africans.

## II. On Organization and the Independence Movement

Both James and Wright pay tribute to Nkrumah for having led the anti-colonial movement to free the Gold Coast colony which he renamed Ghana on March 7, 1957. Following his studies in the US, Nkrumah participated in organizing the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England, in 1945. Others who played key roles at the Fifth Congress included W.E.B. DuBois, Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta, Peter Abrahams, and Mrs. Garvey. Following the Congress, Nkrumah continued his Pan-African organizational activities in London. In 1947, he answered the call to return home to serve as General Secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). Within a few months, he began to have serious differences of opinion with the elitist, reformist lawyer leaders of the UGCC. He considered forming an alternative organization but hesitated. James argues that, despite his previous studies and experiences, it was the actual struggles in the Gold Coast that finally educated Nkrumah; it was the radical masses that pushed Nkrumah from doubts to an actual break to form his own CPP in 1949. With the CPP, Nkrumah was able to launch a pioneering nationalist movement in Africa which, in the opinion of both James and Wright, was as significant as the Russian Revolution.

James offers a more political and socio-economic analysis of the factors that facilitated the nationalist movement in Ghana. Unfortunately, he does this in a somewhat disjointed, repetitive style that requires reading the whole book before one can grasp the comprehensive list of factors mentioned at random. He discusses the impact of a monetized economy, urbanization, the emergence of class stratification, education, and the rise of modern elites. James argues that improved transport and communications facilities played an important role. He cites statistics for the presence of lorries: in 1923 there were 200 lorries in the colony; 3,467 were on the road in 1945, by 1955 the number had reached 12,583 lorries.<sup>7</sup> James credits the chiefs and religious leaders as having played positive roles in mobilizing the people. He also underlines the central role of markets and especially of market women who became the backbone of the CPP organization. He points to selected international factors that facilitated African nationalism: World War II and the role of African veterans, the Indian nationalist movement, the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, progressive and liberal elements in colonizing nations and the global Pan-Africanist movement. In contrast, Wright offers what he terms "a psychological explanation," which he sums up as: "My story of Gold Coast nationalism ... [involves] the substratum of emotion, idealism, and self-vindication of which this nationalism was forged...I

emphasize the primal impulses that give birth to such movements toward freedom."<sup>8</sup>

In 1949, Nkrumah called an open constitutional convention attended by over 80,000 people. Both Wright and James saw this as a tangible sign that the people of the Gold Coast had begun the process of emancipation. Nkrumah organized strikes and boycotts under the slogan "positive action," an adaptation of Gandhi's strategy and tactic of nonviolent resistance to African colonial oppression. Wright captured the atmosphere:

On the morning of January 8, 1950, a colony-wide strike paralyzed the Gold Coast: not a train ran; buses and transportation trucks stood still; only water, electricity, health, and medical services were allowed to function. For twenty-one days, despite threats of dismissal of workers from jobs, martial law, warnings, curfews, and the full evocation of the emergency powers of the Governor, 'Positive Action' and civil disobedience held sway in the Gold Coast.<sup>9</sup>

Where did Nkrumah learn about his "cult of organization?" Wright believes from Nkrumah's Western education and experiences. James mentions the labor and student movements in the USA and England, Pan-African leaders and organizations, the study of world revolutionary movements, and the writings of Marx and Lenin. Specific Pan-African leaders mentioned include DuBois, Padmore, and James himself.

It is significant that both writers totally ignore the impact of Garvey on Nkrumah. Nkrumah's belief in "the organization of the colonial masses" is only partly Leninist; more significantly it is Garveyite. James makes only three, mostly negative, passing remarks about Garvey in his book. Pan-African leaders of a Marxist orientation who place greater emphasis on class struggles have tended to treat Garvey's "race first" philosophy either with hostility or benign neglect. Nkrumah is one of the rare left-wing Pan-African leaders who took Garvey seriously as a mentor:

I read Hegel, Karl Marx, Lenin and Mazzini. The writings of these men did much to influence me in my revolutionary ideas and activities ... but I think that of all the literature that I studied, the book that did more than any other to fire my enthusiasm was *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* published in 1923. Garvey, with his philosophy of 'Africa for the Africans' and his

'Back to Africa' movement, did much to inspire the Negroes of America in the 1920's.<sup>10</sup>

Even though, at the time, Nkrumah seemed to lean towards Lenin's vanguard party, the CPP was never transformed into an elitist vanguard party. It remained an open mass nationalist party just like Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Like the UNIA, the CPP had sections for youth, women, and workers. Garvey's flag had the colors red, green, and black. Nkrumah took Garvey's black star symbol and imposed it on the red, green, and white of independent Ghana's national flag. Nkrumah's personality cult and his ostentation, as well as the penchant for flamboyance, all echo Garvey. Some of this is due to conscious imitation; some is due to coincidence. It is, nevertheless, no mere coincidence that the personality cult-dominated organizations created by Nkrumah and Garvey collapsed in a similar manner: the colorful UNIA collapsed following Garvey's deportation from the USA; the CPP evaporated following the 1966 military coup that overthrew Nkrumah.

### III. The New State and Its Civil Society

Though mostly written over thirty years ago, James' book focuses on Ghana's civil society, bringing a contemporary preoccupation to African political studies. Wright, writing in 1954 and 1957, stresses the critical role of the new Black State and its charismatic ruler.<sup>11</sup> Let me attempt to define "civil society," and as a starting point, cite Marx's often repeated definition as "the true foyer, the true scene of all history."

The forms of exchange, which condition and are conditioned by the forces of production existing in all historical stages preceding our own, amount to civil society which [...] has as its prerequisite and fundamental basis for the simple family and the complex family (also known as the clan).<sup>12</sup>

Larry Diamond gives examples of African civil society:

Despite the lengthening shadow of the state over economic and social life in Africa, a rich and vibrant associational life has developed in many African countries independent of the State, and this pluralism in civil society has been one of the most significant forces

for democracy.... The articulation and mobilization of opposition by intellectuals, chiefs, professionals, trade unions, and religious groups were instrumental in bringing down Kwame Nkrumah's dictatorship.<sup>13</sup>

Other definitions include all those who do not work for salaries paid by the state/public sector: the liberal idea of pluralism, civil tolerance and private property that may be regulated but not restricted/nationalized by the state; and the democratic vision of the people against the state. The essence of contemporary usage, however, is in reference to the associational life of civic, professional, trade union, peasant organizations, student unions, sports/cultural groups, international and indigenous voluntary development organizations and a myriad of other voluntary organizations.

James and Wright discuss at length the role of chiefs as an element of Ghana's civil society. The role and position of chiefs were no longer what they used to be in pre-colonial Africa. Most chiefs, however, had continued to serve as links between the colonial state and the colonized civil society. James argues:

The people live in a unified poverty and squalor. Their chiefs, except for that small number who were big politicians by grace of the administration, were very close to the people, the majority of them as illiterate as their subjects, and governed by a long tradition of democracy in which the chief was no more than a representative of his people who could be, and often was, ruthlessly removed if his actions did not accord with their wishes. This was the condition of some seventy-five percent of the population.<sup>14</sup>

The essence of James' reflections is supported by some of the scholarly studies on Ghana. According to Richard Crook, the Western-educated elite that led the national independence movement "had even weaker links with rural society than the chiefs."<sup>15</sup> Many of the chiefs articulated the general grievances of export farmers against mostly foreign buyers. In some respects, chiefs came to represent agrarian interests. Even though chiefs were expected to legitimize colonial rule, they paradoxically also participated in rural mass actions such as the 1938 cocoa-holdups.<sup>16</sup>

Later on, some of the chiefs began to link rural and urban grievances.

By early 1948 the rise of the campaign by Nii Bonne in Accra, made the government fear a repeat of 1938.... The local studies which followed on Austin's and Apter's work have shown that it is virtually impossible to distinguish, at least in class terms, between the chiefs, local elites and so-called 'nationalists,' that is, those who supported or who claim to have supported the UGCC and then its CPP faction before 1951.<sup>17</sup>

James and Wright both acknowledge the significant role played by Nii Bonne in organizing the foreign imports boycott that would eventually trigger the ex-servicemen association's march to the governor's residence. Colonial forces shot at the peaceful World War II veterans, killing some and wounding many. Following this blatant colonial killing, urban mobs erupted into an orgy of violence and looting, causing the whole colonial enterprise to come to a temporary standstill early in 1948. The boycott movement and the protest march were independent initiatives of crucial social groups within the Gold Coast's colonized civil society. Nkrumah formally admitted that he had nothing to do with initiating either activity, and James, who believes in mass spontaneity in revolutionary situations, concurs that "there is every reason to believe him."<sup>18</sup> Wright feels that Nkrumah's denial is purely "tactical" and that his "secret organization" must have had a hand in the whole affair. On the boycott itself, James notes:

There lived in Accra a sub-chief called Nii Kwabenna Bonne III. He was also a businessman. He made a short campaign through the country enlisting the support of chiefs. He then, on 11 January 1948, called a boycott on the purchase of European imported goods. The boycott was as complete as such an undertaking could be. It became general in the colony and Ashanti and lasted until 24 February.<sup>19</sup>

James views the majority of low income chiefs and subchiefs in a positive light. He criticizes the "big politician chiefs ... the paramount chiefs, the heads of pre-colonial entities recognized by the government,"<sup>20</sup> who tried to distort the customary land tenure system into a means of transforming themselves into a landowning class. The rich chiefs, he argued, were very much responsible for the vacillating political role of chiefs, "wavering between the colonial officials and the local intelligentsia."<sup>21</sup> Relations between the new State elite and chiefs were also worsened by colonial divide-and-rule tactics. The system encouraged hostilities between the chiefs and the educated political elite:



As their former allies, the educated politicians and lawyers began to criticize the Indirect Rule System in the 1930s, the chiefs had to accept the close cooperation offered by the British, particularly when the British seemed ready to bolster up the claims of the Paramount Stools.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of such manipulated setbacks, James hoped that Nkrumah would be wise enough to evolve a dyarchy between a majority of the traditional rulers and the educated political elite. An earlier constitutional proposal on this subject elicited James' enthusiastic response: "What really made the constitution remarkable was the place allotted in it to chiefs and elders, and this brings us to the fundamental questions for the future development of Africa. I can only begin the discussion here."<sup>23</sup> When it became clear that the constitutional experiment would not be given the chance to take root in the new society, James observed with deep regret:

Perhaps this rejection of chiefs was inherent in the forward movement. I beg leave to think differently... there was possibly an evolution of chieftaincy in a national legislature, a meeting of traditional and modern culture, the maintaining of the sense of community, the local and national continuity in the midst of the most violent transition. The possibility of this was to be utterly lost....<sup>24</sup>

Wright believes that chiefs could only act as constraints and not facilitators of the process of rapid modernization that he and Nkrumah shared. For the sake of a stable community and accountable governance, James seemed willing to wait for organic development to bring Ghana into the modern world. Wright and Nkrumah were not so patient. Wright's hostility towards chiefs is partly colored by his belief that it was their ancestors who had sold his ancestors into slavery centuries ago.<sup>25</sup> Apart from this underlying suspicion, he offered other reasons to deny chiefs any important role in the new society. Wright wrote that the chiefs he encountered manifested profound societal ignorance:

And it was more than clear now why Nkrumah had to get rid of these old chiefs. Here was a man who was the head of a town of 25,000 people, and he didn't know that there were 25,000 people in the town! No modern political organization could possibly have need of a man

like him; only the British could use him.... Indeed, I felt, after having talked with this chief for an hour, that the Convention People's Party had been rather kind.<sup>26</sup>

Wright goes on to criticize the whole civil society for beliefs in magic and supernatural forces. He warns Nkrumah that unless confronted radically, such widespread beliefs in magic would delay, perhaps bar altogether, the introduction of Western, rational, scientific values. He blames the chiefs for perpetuating this state of affairs:

These chiefs are and were, one and all, scoundrels, some consciously, some unconsciously, some charmingly, and some with ill humor. Yet, in a world where cause and effect rested upon a basis of magic, they were needed as mediators between the visible and the invisible...they were thrown up as functionaries as the result of the widespread belief in magic among the common people.<sup>27</sup>

Wright maintained a critical stance regarding other elements within the civil society: traditions, tribalism, and religion. He was extremely critical of marriage and funeral traditions as basically wasteful. After experiencing Gold Coast religions and reading Danquah's *Akan Doctrine of God*, he concluded, "the religion of the Akan is not primitive; it is simply terrifying."<sup>28</sup> He urged Nkrumah to march Ghana "from the tribal order to the twentieth century"<sup>29</sup> without explaining in greater detail how this was to be accomplished and without analyzing the problems (and prospects, if any) under the rubric "tribal order." James analyzes tribalism as a phenomenon with both negative and positive aspects, depending on the context. Africa could not simply skip the stage of tribalism:

...(T)his embracing of the millions of Africa by the West can take place only on a clear recognition that they are an African people, with a way of life and society thousands of years old. Tribalism is this way of life. Everything that does not begin there is, for the Africans, vanity and vexation of the spirit. Tribalism in contemporary Africa has a fantastic and curiously modern history.<sup>30</sup>

To point to "modern" aspects of tribal affinities, James analyzed the rise of urban voluntary organizations that preceded nationalist political parties. These associations provided valuable experience of modern forms of administration and organization. "The urbanized Africans...

created their own forms of social unification and they used what came naturally as a basis, the tribe. On a tribal basis they formed unions and associations, a vast number of sports clubs, semi-political associations...."<sup>31</sup> James concluded:

They maintain close communications with their tribal organization or village. They raise money and initiate schemes for education and social welfare in the village or tribe. The tribal bond unites both the literate and illiterate members of the town....

The administration babbled about training the people by stages in order to practice local government in the English manner. When they realized what had been happening, they, who had always claimed that tribalism was one of the main obstacles to the implementation of the settled policy of the government, at once began to do their utmost to stimulate and revive the ancient tribalism in its crudest form.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of James' warnings, CPP ideologues led by Nkrumah himself began to prepare for a single-party state that, according to their arguments, would combat tribalism and promote national unity, channel people's efforts toward nation-building, and allow for differences within the single party. Before Nkrumah was overthrown, an inscription on his statue in Accra read: "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto it."<sup>33</sup> The freedom Nkrumah refers to relates to independence from foreign domination. Freedom is demanded for "the State," not for civil society and the individual. On this issue, Nkrumah's friend and former President of Guinea, Sekou Toure, expressed himself bluntly: "We have chosen the freedom, the right, the power, the sovereignty of the people, and not of the individual. Before this people, you should have no individual personality. Our personality becomes part of the personality of the nation."<sup>34</sup> Philosophical rationalizations preceded or were accompanied by intolerant political measures. CPP ideologues and hooligans launched indiscriminate attacks against chiefs and other traditional figures of authority. Soon enough, the attacks went beyond traditional elites to include all elements in civil society that expressed opinions contrary to the party line, those who had opposed the CPP during the colonial era and those who objected to the CPP project to establish a single party state. There is a convergence between Wright's position and the ultimate measures adopted by Nkrumah and the CPP. James preferred a policy of accommodation and reformist modernization of

chiefs and tribal groupings to provide the new state with organic links in civil society; an all-out campaign against chiefs and similar societal elements, he warned, would lead the new state into an unwinnable war against its own civil society. Nkrumah was overthrown by the military on February 24, 1966 while on a visit to China and Vietnam.

#### IV. The State, the Economy and Democratic Governance

Wright and James did not directly discuss economic problems facing Ghana. Both focused on the pervasive phenomenon of corruption, thereby making indirect references to economic issues. They pointed to the ease with which corruption was being carried out. "It's done," Wright states, "through the awarding of contracts for the building of roads, schools, hospitals, etc."<sup>35</sup> Wright notes that public morality in the Gold Coast (he was writing in 1954 before the advent of Ghana), differed from that in the West. He went on to add that a minority of the population shared his ethical viewpoint. He adopted a relatively rigid moralism as he urged Nkrumah: "Regarding corruption: use fire and acid and cauterize the ranks of your party of all opportunists! Now! Corruption is the one single fact that strikes dismay in the hearts of the friends of African freedom...." (his ellipsis).<sup>36</sup>

James avoids cultural and psychological rationalizations for the pervasive corruption in favor of sociological and political economic explanations. The new Nkrumah regime, benefiting from the expanded colonial state that preceded it, caused the civil society to shrink, while making the state the critical arena of class formation and state control the primary means for the accumulation of personal wealth. On the one hand, this has increased the scope and frequency of corruption. On the other hand, it puts too much at stake in the competition for power, facilitating the brutality, intolerance and zero-sum nature of political conflict. James notices that corruption increased vastly between 1958 and 1960 as a consequence of the bureaucratic expansion and hegemonic role of the new state:

The African state enmeshes, controls, regulates, superintends and tutors civil society from its most comprehensive manifestations of life down to its most insignificant stirrings. At least it attempts to do so, and where it fails will compromise for static acquiescence.... In the African one-party state the term 'party' is a euphemism. It is the state, that expanding source of dignities, wealth and power in countries and among

people which have very little of these and are accustomed to being excluded from them.<sup>37</sup>

This drastic expansion aimed at controlling the economy and civil society, increases the political stakes and prevents the evolution of stable democratic politics. It feeds into the other tendencies that incline towards a single-party dictatorship:

The Western world has not grown up that way.... The result is a ferocious political struggle, the break down of parliamentary government, an almost irresistible movement to the one-party state, the whole economic and social movement pushing in that direction. In such a society corruption of all kinds is inevitable.<sup>38</sup>

James advocates democratic governance as an antidote for bureaucratic expansionism, as a reliable instrument with which to combat corruption and as a facilitator of public checks and balances that are necessary for political accountability. The interesting thing is that most left-wing Pan-Africanists advocated radical socialist regimes. Unlike other works by James, this book hardly mentions "socialism," perhaps three times and in passing. In this case, at least, the author meant to emphasize the problem of governance and to postpone his own preoccupation with socialist production/distribution. Instead, he urges Nkrumah to adopt a power-sharing version of democracy championed by the late Malawi political leader and thinker, Dunduzu Chisiza:

The British two-party system (so wrote Chisiza) is unsuited to Africa. It is useful as a democratic medium of expression. Don't abolish it, but for the next ten years let the party that wins invite members of the opposition to form a national government. Chisiza understood politics in terms of people, not people in terms of politics.<sup>39</sup>

In response to the problems of political development, Wright urged Nkrumah to install a development/modernization oriented dictatorship. *Black Power* ended with an open letter to Kwame Nkrumah with the sloganized conclusion: "AFRICAN LIFE MUST BE MILITARIZED."<sup>40</sup> Wright reached this conclusion on the basis of his psychological theory of development and underdevelopment:

African culture has not developed the personalities of the people to a degree that their egos are stout, hard, sharply

defined; there is too much cloudiness in the African's mentality, a kind of sodden vagueness that makes for lack of confidence, an absence of focus that renders that mentality incapable of grasping the workaday world. And until confidence is established at the center of African personality, there can be no question of marching from the tribal order to the twentieth century.... (Wright's ellipsis).<sup>41</sup>

Incidentally, this conclusion converged with Nkrumah's own vision of development. In the preface to his autobiography, Nkrumah declared: "What other countries have taken three hundred years or more to achieve, a once dependent territory must try to accomplish in a generation if it is to survive. Unless it is, as it were, 'jet-propelled,' it will lag behind and thus risk everything for which it fought."<sup>42</sup> James wished to see Ghana develop according to its own organic rhythm. He read this passage as a dangerous vision that would lead down the slippery slope toward dictatorship.

#### V. Conclusions

At a time when Africanist social science research focused almost exclusively on the post-colonial state, James sought compatibility between Ghana's civil society and state. The autonomy of civil society was a key aspect of his democratization theory. Wright's perceptions were more in line with conventional Africanist political science as well as the political thought of Pan-Africanist leaders such as Sekou Toure, Modibo Keita, Madeira Keita, Mamadou Dia, Jomo Kenyatta, and Kwame Nkrumah himself. Even the liberal Julius Nyerere advocated a single-party state, albeit a semi-democratic version. Wright wanted Ghana's tradition-infused civil society to be changed into a dynamic Westernized society and state. With regard to this "conventional wisdom" of that period, John Wiseman recalls: "to avoid the charge of ethnocentrism, many scholars adopted a bogus Afrocentrism ... Although the same people would have been justifiably horrified if their own governments had decided to ban all opposition, they were quite willing to accept it in Africa."<sup>43</sup>

The Nkrumah regime was overthrown by the military on February 24, 1966. A number of explanations were given to account for his downfall. Fitch and Oppenheimer, for example, claimed that Nkrumah's nonviolent reformist path to decolonization compromised his aspirations to create a revolutionary socialist party.<sup>44</sup> Soviet writer Yuri Smertin argued that Nkrumah lost power because, unlike Lenin, he

refused to create a vanguard party that would provide "a stable organization of leaders maintaining continuity," and instead relied on his nationalist mass party in which "the widest possible variety of political trends, frequently running contrary to the party leaders' socialist aspirations, were represented in the CPP and its leadership."<sup>45</sup> T. Peter Omari relied on psychological insights to analyze Nkrumah's personality and personal rulership and concluded that he replaced "alien rule" by "an indigenous tyrant."<sup>46</sup> Edward Said portrayed Nkrumah as a tragic figure "whose failure either to take his people into his confidence or realistically assess the realities of ... imperialism brought about his defeat."<sup>47</sup>

James' warning to Nkrumah may, in retrospect, be read as an explanation for Nkrumah's downfall. While others placed all blame on external forces (e.g., the Central Intelligence Agency), for James, the problem was essentially internal rather than external: the lack of rule of law, the lack of organic links between the emerging state and its historic and modern civil society, and the resulting lack of democratic governance. James emphasizes one telling episode as symptomatic of Ghana's political decay:

The continuous crisis in Ghana had reached a climax when Nkrumah dismissed his chief justice for giving a judicial decision of which he disapproved. ...The very structure, juridical, political and moral, of the state is at one stroke destroyed, and there is automatically placed on the agenda a violent restoration of some sort of legal connection between the government and population. By this single act, Nkrumah prepared the population of Ghana for the morals of the Mafia.<sup>48</sup>

James referred to arguably Marx's most subtle political analysis in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in order to advise Nkrumah about legitimizing and sustaining his regime, citing Marx's own words: "reduce the army of officials as far as possible and finally, let civil society and public opinion create organs of their own, independent of the government power."<sup>49</sup>

James' focus on civil society may be read as an attempt to define a third arena which is "public," that is beyond the private concerns of isolated individuals but also not identical with what Nkrumah termed "the political kingdom" of the state. This public realm of free voluntary association mediates between the state and the private individual. In modern society, political parties constitute a universal form of mediation; in essence, the representation of the private interests of civil society in the state. Unfortunately, although James mentions various

types of civic voluntary associations, he is silent on the role of political parties in safeguarding the interests and autonomy of civil society while facilitating democratic politics. His comment about the need to form governments through "grand coalitions" does indicate, however, that he envisioned a multiparty state.

C.L.R. James' and Richard Wright's writings on Ghana categorize them as social critics, analyzed in Michael Walzer's *Interpretation and Social Criticism*.<sup>50</sup> James does fit Walzer's profile of a "connected" social critic. He challenges Nkrumah and the CPP leadership, criticizes their ritual practices, manifests revulsion when analyzing corruption, and yet goes on to reflect patient understanding and affirmation; he expresses his anger but, even more importantly, demonstrates his deep concern for Ghana and the future of Africa. Wright, on the other hand, reflects the "detached critic from outside," who looked at Nkrumah's society as a disinterested stranger and applied standards worked out in the West.

Some of the intellectuals from Ghana were extremely angered by Wright's open letter to Nkrumah advising him to rule Ghana with an iron fist, including Wright's single sentence prophecy: "AFRICAN LIFE MUST BE MILITARIZED." Kwame Anthony Appiah, a philosopher from Ghana, expressed himself bitterly:

There is something simply mad in proposing from Paris, less than a decade after the Second World War, that Nkrumah—like Hitler and Mussolini—needs the instruments of Fascism if the trains of the Gold Coast are to run on time. And in proposing what is, despite his explicit denials, the introduction of the fascist state (uncomfortably suggestive of the totalitarian states that we deplored in Africa thirty years on), in proposing a solution that he acknowledges will appear "hard, cruel," the overwhelming impression Wright leaves is that he needs to punish Africa for failing him....<sup>51</sup>

Appiah's critical reaction, though understandable, is rather harsh in our view. Let us recall that during that period, single-party dictatorships were seen as history's answer to problems of underdevelopment. Conventional wisdom—social scientists, development planners, African leaders, donor agencies—advocated the need to give up, or at least postpone, democratic freedoms to attain economic development. It was James who was actually swimming against the main current of opinion.

What was Nkrumah's response to these books? While in power, he became estranged from his early mentor and hardly responded to James' numerous letters of unsolicited advice. Pan-



African historian St. Clair Drake recalls asking Nkrumah what he thought of Wright's advice in *Black Power* that Nkrumah needed to get tough and militarize his country in order to bring it into the twentieth century. Nkrumah's response: "Sometimes I think Dick Wright is right."<sup>52</sup>

It is now almost forty years since Ghana gained political independence. James wanted the new state to serve as a *mediator* to deal with critical tasks affecting civil society—such as ethnicity and intergroup competition, basic rules and procedures on group interactions, the recruitment of socio-economic and political elites, and the mobilization and distribution of resources. Wright wanted the state to serve as a societal *controller* and the Nkrumahist elite to employ the power of state institutions to coerce compliance on the part of civil society at large. Now, virtually forty years later, Africa has yet to witness a country that has improved economically under authoritarian rule (a trade-off of civil liberties for bread). This has brought about a widespread movement for democratization as a reaction to this bitter experience of dictatorship and worsening socioeconomic conditions. James, as noted above, is one of a handful of pioneers for a "Developmental Democracy" paradigm that Sklar saw emerging as part of Africa's second independence struggle.<sup>53</sup>

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan actually gained independence in 1956; however, as an Afro-Arab nation, it did not fully qualify as a "Black Nation" and besides, it did not have a Kwame Nkrumah to enhance its role and position within the Pan-African world.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard Sklar, "Democracy in Africa," in *African Studies Review*, Volume 26, Number 3/4 (September/December 1983), 11-24.

<sup>3</sup> C.L.R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (Westport: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Wright, *Black Power* (New York: Harper Publishers, 1954); and also *White Man, Listen!* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1957).

<sup>5</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 44.

<sup>6</sup> In 1953/1954, Ghana was still called the British Colony of the Gold Coast.

<sup>7</sup> James, *op. cit.*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *White Man, Listen!* *op. cit.*, 181.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-182.

<sup>10</sup> Nkrumah, *Ghana, op. cit.*, 45.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan, *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1988), 29-30. The new

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African state, derived from the colonial state, possesses several elements that cumulatively constitute a "reason of state:" territoriality, sovereignty, an aspiration toward nationality, a set of institutions of rule, the state as an idea in official and citizens' minds, the state as a legal system, and "a participant in a global system of juridicially equivalent units."

12 Karl Marx cited in Jean-Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993), 155.

13 Larry Diamond, et al. eds. *Democracy in Developing Countries: Africa (Volume Two)* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988), 23.

14 James, *op. cit.*, 52-53.

15 Richard C. Crook, "Decolonization, the Colonial State, and Chieftaincy in the Gold Coast," *African Affairs*, Volume 85, Number 338 (January 1986), 83.

16 *Ibid.*, 94.

17 *Ibid.*, 96.

18 James, *op. cit.*, 43.

19 *Ibid.*, 43.

20 Crook, *op. cit.*, 89

21 James, *op. cit.*, 41.

22 Crook, *op. cit.*, 91.

23 James, *op. cit.*, 96-97.

24 *Ibid.*

25 Wright, *Black Power, op. cit.*, 35.

26 *Ibid.*, 253.

27 *Ibid.*, 308.

28 *Ibid.*, 217.

29 *Ibid.*, 343.

30 James, *op. cit.*, 20.

31 *Ibid.*, 54.

32 *Ibid.*, 55.

33 Cited in Paul E. Sigmund, ed. *The Ideologies of the Developing Nations* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1963), 5.

34 Cited in *Ibid.*, 5, note 2.

35 Wright, *Black Power, op. cit.*, 301.

36 *Ibid.*, 349-350.

37 James, *op. cit.*, 13.

38 *Ibid.*, 184-185.

39 *Ibid.*, 187.

40 Wright, *Black Power*, 347.

41 *Ibid.*, 343.

42 Nkrumah, *Ghana, op. cit.*, x.

43 John A. Wiseman, *Democracy in Black Africa: Survival and Renewal* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1990), 5.

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- 44 Robert Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer, *Ghana: The End of an Illusion* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966).
- 45 Yuri Smertin, *Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 128 and 131.
- 46 T. Peter Omari, *Kwame Nkrumah, The Anatomy of An African Dictatorship* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1970), 8.
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- 48 James, *op. cit.*, 10-11.
- 49 Karl Marx, cited in *Ibid.*, 12.
- 50 Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).
- 51 Kwame Anthony Appiah, "A Long Way From Home: Wright in the Gold Coast," in Harold Bloom, ed. *Richard Wright* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 189-190.
- 52 Cited in George Shepperson and St. Clair Drake, "The Fifth Pan-African Conference, 1945 and the All African People's Congress, 1958," *Contributions in Black Studies*, Number 8 (1986-1987), 57.
- 53 Richard Sklar, *op. cit.*