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Misrecognition in the making of a state: Ghana's international relations under Kwame Nkrumah¹

Abstract

This paper draws on a Kleinian psychoanalytic reading of Hegel's theory of the struggle for recognition to explore the role of international misrecognition in the creation of state subjectivity. It focuses on Ghana's early years, when international relations were powerfully conceptualised and used by Kwame Nkrumah in his bid to bring coherence to a fragile infant state. Nkrumah attempted to create separation and independence from the West on the one hand, and intimacy with a unified Africa on the other. By creating juxtapositions between Ghana and these idealised international others, he was able to create a fantasy of a coherent state, built on a fundamental misrecognition of the wider world. As the fantasy bumped up against the realities of Ghana's failing economy, fractured social structures and complex international relationships, it foundered, causing alienation and despair. I argue that the failure of this early fantasy was the start of Ghana's quest to begin processes of individuation and subjectivity, and that its undoing was an inevitable part of the early stages of misrecognition, laying the way for more grounded struggles for recognition and the development of a more complex state-subjectivity.

Key words: Hegel; Klein; Ghana; Nkrumah; misrecognition; statehood; IR

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What does a new state feel like? In a powerful passage of his book *Africa must Unite*, Kwame Nkrumah explains what he felt on becoming leader of independent Ghana in 1957, describing the 'emptiness that colonialism has left'.² He writes about how he and his colleagues walked through Christiansborg Castle, the British governor's former residence:

Not a rag, not a book was to be found; not a piece of paper; not a single reminder that for very many years the colonial administration had had its centre there. That complete denudation seemed like a line drawn across our continuity. It was as though there had been a definite intention to cut off all links between the past and present which could help us in finding our bearings.³

Nkrumah's feelings chime with Ki-Zerbo's description of newly independent African states sitting on top of countries in which people were disconnected from themselves, 'a sort of shipwreck towed along by the thread of a history made and written by the European conquerors'.⁴ Economic structures, Nkrumah wrote, had been designed to feed Britain's colonial interests, and contained 'a kind of

² Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (London: Panaf Books, 1998), p. xv.

³ Nkrumah (1998) p. xiv.

⁴ Joseph Ki-Zerbo 'African personality and the new African society' in American Society of African Culture (ed) *Pan-Africanism Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962) pp. 267-82, p. 271.

Alice in Wonderland craziness about them'.⁵ The education system had trained people to be 'inferior copies of Englishmen, caricatures to be laughed at with our pretensions to British bourgeois gentility, our grammatical faultiness and distorted standards betraying us at every turn. We were neither fish nor fowl'.⁶

As African states were 'born' – granted independence – from the late 1950s onwards, they formed new political units, replacing both pre-colonial and colonial political entities. Ghana had no territorial form to return to and it needed a new name to replace the colonial 'Gold Coast'. Its physical boundaries and state structures had been established through colonial conquest and were an alien legacy for most Africans. Foreign rule had left Africans with a 'crisis of conscience', a 'loss of identity'.⁷ Now they were meant to become properly African states, a conception that had shallow political resonance for many Africans who were more inclined to think of themselves in ethnic or regional terms⁸ and faced the enormous challenge of how to develop an African form of

⁵ Nkrumah (1998) p. 27.

⁶ Nkrumah (1998) p. 49.

⁷ Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism* (London: Panaf Books, 1964), cited and discussed by Ama Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁸ There's a wide literature on this topic. For a sense of the range and scale of the topic, see for example Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Ethnicity and National Integration in West Africa', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 1:3, 1960, pp. 129-39; M. A.

Mohamed and John Markakis, *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa* (Uppsala:

subjectivity. The new states carried plenty of baggage, but they needed to establish themselves and their personalities afresh.

Nkrumah, who became prime minister of Ghana at independence in 1957, describes Ghana as empty, crazy and alienated from itself, not properly self-conscious and unsure how to act. To make matters more difficult, it was the first African state to come into existence through independence. If it lacked self-consciousness, it also lacked an immediate other with which to engage and against which to fashion itself. How could it begin to find or make this other?

In this article, I use Hegel's struggle for recognition and Klein's psychoanalytic theory to explore the way states realise themselves through external relationships. This is to take up Epstein, Lindemann and Sending's point that 'self-other interactions... are what makes the self into a self'.⁹ In Hegelian terms, newly-born Ghana might be described as a pre-subject, as yet it had not realised itself as a state. In Kleinian terms it appeared to be in a schizoid-paranoid condition, internally fragmented, lacking an 'ego' by which to organise its selfhood. For both Hegel and Klein, the creation of coherent selfhood comes

Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998); Peter Vale, *Security and Politics in South Africa: the regional dimension* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2003); and Joshua Forrest, *Subnationalism in Africa: ethnicity, alliances, and politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004).

⁹ Charlotte Epstein, Thomas Lindemann & Ole Jacob Sending, 'Misrecognition in World Politics' (framing paper for this SI, 2018), p. XX.

about through relationships; only by engaging with others beyond can it understand itself. Hegel describes such processes as struggles for recognition and Klein understands them through object-relations theory. I use a Kleinian reading of Hegel as a model for explaining the mechanics of state-formation and the Ghanaian example to think through what it takes to establish statehood 'from scratch'.¹⁰ In it, Klein fleshes out Hegel's mechanics of recognition at the individual level in a way that highlights a consistency of ideas between the two; applying a Kleinian reading of recognition to the national/international level takes her ideas well beyond her comfort zone of the consulting room.

I understand 'statehood' or 'state-subjectivity' as analogous to selfhood or self-consciousness. It is made up both of a sense of self – the degree to which the state can embody the identity and aspirations of its population – and its ability to act, its agency. Statehood is therefore both a gathering together and making sense of internal objects on the domestic level, and the capacity to exercise agency beyond itself, on the international level. Nkrumah, as we shall see, did

¹⁰ Nkrumah's powerful picture of starting from scratch is a little disingenuous. Ghana's independence was not an overnight revolution but 'achieved by staged constitutional steps', in which he was a key player, heading a transitional government from 1951. David Apter: 'Nkrumah, Charisma and the Coup' *Daedalus* 97:3, 1968, pp. 757-92; p. 757. Nonetheless, his description of a dramatically disruptive and historically unprecedented transformation, moving from identityless-ness and conscienceless-ness to viable new state is persuasive.

both these things as he attempted to make the Ghanaian state, and each fed upon the other.

It has puzzled scholars of Ghanaian and African politics that the man who pursued pan-Africanism so vigorously, who set out to make a United States of Africa, ended up producing the template for a group of independent states, which have largely been unable to establish collective political and economic groupings.¹¹ I argue here that the emergence of Ghanaian nationalism and sense of statehood happened *because* of Nkrumah's pursuit of pan-Africanism, not in spite of it. The Ghanaian state emerged as an individual through its international relationships, and in particular through the way Nkrumah forged Ghana by 'splitting' its external others into a good Africa which could be perfectly identified with, and a bad West which could be completely rejected. Despite historical accounts which suggest that both relationships were more complex than Nkrumah painted them, his ideas of a dichotomised world were popular and powerful. I show how he created these idealised others through processes of misrecognition to make sense of a fledgling nation that barely knew what it was.

My argument is that misrecognition in IR is not only inescapable (as others in this SI argue), but is necessary to achieve a sense of stability during periods of

¹¹ David Birmingham, Kwame Nkrumah: the father of African nationalism, revised edition (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998); David E. Apter and James S. Coleman, 'Pan-Africanism or nationalism in Africa', *American Society of African Culture* (1962), pp. 81–115.

uncertainty. Nkrumah created a set of international relationships that were rooted in misrecognition: his paintings of an idealised pan-Africa and a demonised West were partly imagined, certainly flattened and idealised, projected onto the wider world as a way to resolve internal ambiguity. Yet despite their roots in fantasy, these relationships were productive in establishing a fragile sense of statehood. Only once a degree of self-realisation had been created, could the state begin to develop more mature international relationships characterised by ambiguity and demanding a more robust selfhood. By that time, Nkrumah had outlived his role. Thus my chief concern in this article is intra-subjectivity and how it begins to be built on inter-subjectivity. The argument builds on Epstein's discussion of Hegel's argument that the formation of the subject is 'steeped in concrete experiences'.¹² It shares many of the preoccupations found in the other contributions to this SI – with agency¹³, sovereignty¹⁴ and the instability of recognition¹⁵ – but while they tend to focus

¹² Charlotte Epstein 'Recognition Theory's Owl: theorising misrecognition with Hegel and Lacan' (this SI, 2018).

¹³ Miranda Holm and Ole Jacob Sending 'States before Relations: institutionalised misrecognition and the performance of statehood' (this SI, 2018); Thomas Lindemann 'Agency, (Mis)Recognition in International Violence: the case of French Jihadism' (this SI, 2018)

¹⁴ Catarina Kinnvall and Svensson 'Misrecognition and the Indian State: the desire for sovereign agency' (this SI, 2018); Ayse Zarakol 'Sovereign Equality as Misrecognition' (this SI, 2018);

¹⁵ Kinnvall and Svensson (this SI, 2018); Epstein (this SI, 2018).

on the inter-subjectivity part of the Hegelian argument,¹⁶ mine remains largely at the intra-subjective level.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I explain my theoretical framework in more detail, showing how a Kleinian approach to Hegel gives us a sharper analytical handle on understanding the role of recognition and misrecognition in the shaping of individual subjectivity. I outline three stages: first, manic-schizoid or pre-cognition/subjectivity; second, splitting and idealisation or misrecognition; and third, acknowledgement of misrecognition and the possibility for recognition. The rest of the article explores these three stages in the early life of Ghana, describing first, Ghana's fragile condition at independence; second, its early, idealised international relationships; and third, the replacement of these with more complex relationships.¹⁷

¹⁶ Tanya Aalberts 'Misrecognition and the Aporia of the Family of Nations' (this SI, 2018); Holm and Sending (this SI, 2018); Lindemann (this SI, 2018).

¹⁷ I am not a historian of Ghana and I draw therefore on the historical accounts of others to support my broader theoretical and methodological argument. Many of these accounts fit within a complex ideological topography. Ghana, the first African country to become independent, was a magnet for an early generation of Africanist scholars who, as Jeffrey Ahlman writes in a recent account of the period, were drawn into an ideological 'tug-of-war' cast either as a 'struggle between the "modern and the "traditional", in the case of modernization-minded figures... or as one of revolutionary versus reactionary'. (Jeffrey S Ahlman *Living with Nkrumahism: nation, state and pan-Africanism in Ghana* (Ohio: Ohio

A Kleinian reading of recognition¹⁸

University Press, 2017) p. 10). Academic accounts always fall within the particular ideological bent of their authors, but those of this period of early African independence are particularly ideological – indeed, many academics became part of the political landscape themselves, acting as advisors or sympathetic cheerleaders for Nkrumah and the Convention People’s Party (CPP). It is interesting in the context of the argument presented in this article that Ghanaian politics was at the time seen as so clearly dichotomised – and this is a trend that continues, notably with Ali Mazrui’s description of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ Nkrumahism. Ali Mazrui Nkrumah’s legacy and Africa’s triple heritage between globalisation and counter-terrorism (Accra, 2004).

¹⁸ Unlike her contemporary, Jacques Lacan, Klein does not draw on Hegel and neither as far as I am aware, do any of her followers. The connections between Klein and Hegel made in this article are mine and build on earlier work: Julia

Recognition, understood within a Kleinian reading of Hegel, is fractious and unstable, built on a struggle between desires for oneness with and separation from an other. Recognition is thus already underpinned by inherent instability, rooted in mutual dependence and an acknowledgement of radical separation. When Epstein et al talk of the inevitable failure of struggles for recognition,¹⁹ I see this failure stemming from the impossibility of achieving anything more than glimpses of recognition, snatched moments of a precarious balance between two inevitably contradictory conditions. Hegel captures the fraught nature of this ongoing process of seeking recognition in his discussion of the way in which relationships of love within the family – the prototype of all relationships – continue to be shaped by dialectically opposed desires of wanting *to be* the other and asserting radical *separation from* the other.

Gallagher, Zimbabwe's International Relations: fantasy and reality in the making of the state (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017); Julia Gallagher, 'Creating a State: a Kleinian reading of recognition in Zimbabwe's regional relationships', *European Journal of International Relations*: DOI: 10.1177/1354066115588204, 2015, pp. 1-24. In fact, Klein's work has rarely been applied to political and social questions, possibly because she did virtually nothing in these directions herself, choosing to keep her ideas in their clinical context. For two notable exceptions see: Hanna Segal, *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War: papers 1972-1995* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997); C. Fred Alford, *Melanie Klein and Critical Social Theory: an account of politics, art and reason based on her psychoanalytic theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁹ Epstein et al (this SI, 2018).

The first moment in love is that I do not wish to be an independent person in my own right and that, if I were, I would feel deficient and incomplete. The second moment is that I find myself in another person, that I gain recognition in this person, who in turn gains recognition in me. Love is therefore the most immense contradiction.²⁰

This is why recognition is precarious and challenging, and inevitably frustrated. Subjects are frequently too fragile to cope with such demanding tensions: the balance fails, recognition capsizes and misrecognition ensues. This is why misrecognition is such an enduring feature, even of the most robust and mature relationships. And given that, as both Hegel and Klein assert, subjectivity rests on the ability to recognise and be recognised by others, it explains why and how subjectivity comes under pressure, driving the continued search for 'real recognition'. Selfhood rests on shaky foundations.

There are two reasons for using Klein to read Hegel on recognition. The first is to help us understand Hegel more easily. Hegel can be difficult to grasp as his description of the person who has not yet achieved self-consciousness as 'abstract' is abstract in itself. In Hegel's dialectic, the 'abstract' only begins to construct itself through engagement with its 'negative' and is thus able to move

²⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, edited by Allen W. Wood, translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 199.

towards the 'concrete'.²¹ Klein, who used clinical work with individual patients to develop a theory of infant ego-development, is much more graphic in her description of the pre-conscious position as 'schizoid-paranoid' or fragmented. In this fragmented (for Hegel, abstract) state, a new-born is overwhelmed by instinctive drives and lacks the ability to organise, to construct herself as a coherent, thinking, acting being. The person is 'in bits', ruled by appetites, without an understanding of herself as separate from the things she experiences in the world around her. Through 'reality-testing' (Hegel's struggles for recognition) with external objects in the outside world (Hegel's negative), she begins to put her internal part-objects together. She begins to build an ego (self-consciousness), which is a way to organise herself and mediate her engagement with the world around her. Klein gives us a description of the concrete experience of self-construction.

Second, Klein's more graphic account doesn't just make Hegel more graspable; it gives us a way to understand how selfhood is constructed through misrecognition too – something he is less clear on. Klein understands different registers of engagement with the wider world. Some are rooted in idealisation, in which we engage with external objects we have created by projecting our own fragmented internal objects. We split these into purely good and bad objects as a way to enable us to defend against being overwhelmed by ourselves and our world. This world we create/encounter feeds omnipotence fantasies by

²¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

conforming to our inner world and appearing subject to our control. Our 'relationship' to it is one of misrecognition because through it we maintain fantasies of independence and control. But other kinds of engagement emerge as our ego gains strength, and in these we glimpse more complex external others that begin to shape our own internal objects, forcing them to shift and adjust. We lose omnipotence; we realise mutual dependence; we allow ourselves to understand the world as separate and other. These more mature relationships are rooted in what Hegel calls recognition.

I will not rehearse the reading of Hegel and misrecognition which is dealt with in detail elsewhere in this SI.²² But I will provide some more detail on Klein's ideas, and attempt to show further how these can be read alongside Hegel to produce a way to see how misrecognition works in the formation of subjectivity.

A Kleinian approach to misrecognition posits it as precursor, constitutive of, but also destructive of, recognition. The difference between recognition and misrecognition can be seen in the various ways infants and young children relate to the objects in the world around them. According to Klein, desires for oneness and separation originate in innate life and death instincts. In early life, these threaten to overwhelm the infant who is barely aware of herself as an entity, and unable to separate internal from external objects. As a defensive mechanism, the

²² Epstein et al (this SI, 2018); Epstein (this SI, 2018).

infant projects her desires onto external objects²³ where they are experienced as completely separate from each other – a process Klein calls ‘splitting’.²⁴ The world appears to be a collection of part objects, wholly defined by internal drives, and split in very idealised ways – wholly good and wholly bad. In these early stages of ego-formation, unbearable aggressive emotions are projected onto external objects in particularly violent ways. Klein argues that infants fantasise about tearing and biting objects into bits.²⁵ At the same time, idealised ‘good’ emotions are projected onto external objects which are experienced as perfectly loving. In this way, the infant creates an ideal world for itself in which ‘good’ and ‘bad’ objects are experienced as completely separate – it is, Klein argues, a defence against the ‘paranoid-schizoid position’ of early life.²⁶

²³ Hegel says recognition is achieved through relations with objects (things) and subjects (people). Klein talks only of objects, but she means both things and people, and, as for Hegel, it is the latter that offer the best prospects for self-realisation. This is because people push back.

²⁴ Melanie Klein, ‘Notes on some Schizoid Mechanisms’, *Envy and Gratitude and other works, 1946-1963* (London: Vintage, 1997a), pp. 1–24.

²⁵ Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* (London: Karnac Books, 2006)

²⁶ Melanie Klein, ‘Love, Guilt and Reparation’, *Love, Guilt and Reparation and other works, 1921-1945* (London: Vintage, 1998a), pp. 306–43. Klein’s depiction of the ‘good breast’ and ‘bad breast’ describes this fracturing of external objects, wherein the same object – here the mother – is sometimes experienced as wholly good and loving, and sometimes as wholly bad and destructive. Melanie Klein,

The misrecognition of external objects establishes a profound self-misrecognition. The subject feels in command of itself and its world. In her article in this SI, Epstein discusses the ‘fantasy of sovereignty’ as described by Lacan in his exposition of the Mirror Stage in an infant’s life.²⁷ As for Lacan, for Klein the fantasy is necessary to get a grip on the internal chaos the infant experiences. But ultimately it must be debunked if the infant is to begin to develop a more grounded ego rooted in acknowledgement of misrecognition and the move towards struggles for recognition – both of itself and the wider world.

This comes about inevitably because the object relating works both ways. External objects encountered in the world are taken in (introjected) to help constitute the infant. This is the mechanism of object-relations, and the exchange of objects through projection and introjection is the basis for the gradual emergence of the ego.²⁸ A trying out of our internally-shaped frameworks in the world, something like a constant assessment of the world within ready-made frames of reference, becomes a form of reality-testing.²⁹ Their introjection

‘Envy and Gratitude’ in *Envy and Gratitude and other works, 1946-1963* (London: Vintage, 1997d), pp. 176–235.

²⁷ Epstein (this SI, 2018).

²⁸ Melanie Klein, ‘On Identification’ (1955), *Envy and Gratitude and other works, 1946-1963* (London: Vintage, 1997b), pp. 141–75.

²⁹ John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss (Volume Two): Separation, Anxiety and Anger* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

supports the internal objects, reinforcing a sense of their solidity.³⁰ The interaction between introjection and projection 'both builds up the internal world and shapes the picture of external reality', and so the two are interdependent.³¹ As their egos emerge, people learn to recognise and acknowledge their own aggression and to engage with the world more reflectively. They begin to recognise ambiguity in it – that objects are both good and bad – reflecting and helping them build their own more complex internal objects. Here then we have a sense of progression from an early period of misrecognition, both of the external world and of the self, which gives way to possibilities of recognition as the ego emerges and strengthens.

Splitting and projecting is not only a defensive mechanism, but a creative process without which selfhood cannot emerge. Winnicott (who trained under Klein) discusses it in terms of 'playing', the way in which we shape the world around our own fantasies. 'It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self'.³² Yet in this early stage of ego-development, recognition is a long way off, since the 'other' is essentially a creation of the self. Recognition really begins to emerge when we supplement

³⁰ Klein (1997a).

³¹ Klein (1997b), p. 141.

³² Donald Winnicott, 'The use of an object and relating through identifications', *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), pp. 86–94; p. 54.

play and fantasy in our engagement with the real world, when we allow our 'play' objects to be tested by reality. This amounts to an acceptance that not only does the subject shape her objects, but the objects shape her. This stage is full of pain and stress because relinquishing the fantasy of omnipotence and the glamour of self-idealisation undoes where we thought we had got to with our selfhood. It becomes clear that what we recognised as ourselves in relation to our others was built on a fantasy. Klein describes this as the 'depressive position' in which the subject realises her weakness and her hatred for loved objects which are now accepted as part of whole, ambiguous objects. As the subject confronts the loss of the ideal and of her omnipotence, she experiences despair and loneliness.³³

The point to draw from this is that at the moment at which the ego is fragile, fantasy and 'play' are particularly crucial for the establishment of selfhood. It is only as the ego becomes stronger that a more painful engagement with the world on its terms is really possible. This suggests that early engagement with the world is necessarily dominated by forms of 'misrecognition', the tendency to see and shape the world in one's own (also misrecognised) image, through processes of splitting and projecting. Misrecognition is thus a vital part of the emergence of selfhood, but ultimately it must also make room for a more troubling search for recognition through which we accept separation from and dependence on other subjects. However, we never leave misrecognition behind: Klein is clear that

³³ Melanie Klein, 'On the sense of loneliness', *Envy and Gratitude and other works 1946-1963* (London: Vintage, 1997c), pp. 300–13; p. 305.

defensive splitting mechanisms remain an important characteristic of relationships, particularly in times of anxiety.³⁴ Indeed, given the instability of recognition itself, anxiety is never banished – Kristeva describes this as the inevitability of ‘psychic anxiety’.³⁵ Because of this, misrecognition can be seen to be both a precursor to recognition, a component, and also a continual disturber of it.

Scaling up: from infant to ‘infant-state’

The Klein-Hegel framework gives us a series of three steps which I am going to use to understand Ghana under Nkrumah. The first is the incoherence experienced at birth, and the overwhelming anxiety caused by the lack of an ego able to regulate internal chaos. The second is the creation of split objects, projected onto the world and encountered as external idealised objects, part of early attempts to establish selfhood. And the third is the breakdown of these objects under the encounter with substantial external objects that push back. This breakdown undermines selfhood premised on misrecognition but also lays the foundations for possibilities of recognition and a more robust selfhood.

Before I do this I must address the tricky questions of scaling. How can I use ideas about the emergence of the individual’s ego to understand the creation of

³⁴ Melanie Klein, ‘Mourning and its relation to manic-depressive states’ in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-1945* (London: Vintage, 1998b): 344–69

³⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

Ghana – something of a big jump? There are two problems here. The first is to treat African states as infants, at best patronising and at worst potentially playing into modernisation discourses that have described African countries as ‘growing up’ to become more like European ‘adult’ or ‘developed’ states. And the second is IR’s perennial problem of translating ideas about individuals onto states.

In relation to the first problem, there has been a powerful strand in thinking about the way African statehood emerged that talked about ‘growing up’ and ‘maturing’ (many Africanists used such terms themselves around the time of independence and it was a major preoccupation of Nkrumah himself).³⁶ Rostow’s modernisation model that was popular at the time understands the emergence of the new states in such terms and more recent ideas also set African states as ‘behind’ on a trajectory of progress.³⁷ These modernisation theses tend to see

³⁶ Saburi Oladeni Biobaku, Secretary to the Premier, Western Region, Nigeria wrote: ‘We think it a matter of the highest priority to develop our people and our resources, to “modernize” in the phraseology of Professor Rostow; when we achieve this we shall invest the African personality with a potency that is bound to be respected everywhere, and our influence in the community of nations will be real, not superficial.’ Saburi Oladeni Biobaku, ‘Comments’ in American Society of African Culture (ed), *Pan-Africanism Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 129–32; p. 131.

³⁷ Walt Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), and for a more recent example of this logic see Robert Cooper, *The*

states growing up by a process of adjusting to an external model through emulation. The 'backward' African condition is remedied through adoption of 'modern' Western methods and norms. This is not how I understand the process of state self-realisation. According to my Hegel-Klein framing, emulation has nothing to do with the emergence of subjectivity, since with emulation the new 'subject' remains dependent on its object, slavishly bound into copying it until it achieves sameness. For our purposes here, a dynamic struggle between wanting to be and rejecting the other lies at the heart of the emergence of subjectivity. The internal contradictions that imbue it make the process of 'becoming' provisional and cyclical at best. While I have suggested that there is a difference between misrecognition found in the paranoid-schizoid position and unstable recognition found in the depressive position, and I have even called the latter a 'mature' form of relationship, I have been careful to point out that adults too respond to anxiety by employing strategies of misrecognition. For this approach, subjects continue to be formed through relationships throughout life – subjectivity is not a goal that has been achieved by some and still eludes others. Recognition can be seen as a driver of this process, something continuously pursued but never achieved.³⁸ I therefore want to be very clear that when I talk about the idea of an 'infant' Ghanaian state and the 'development' of statehood, I do so within this understanding of relationships as dynamic, contested and unsettled, not a modernisation framing. Ghana here provides a way to explore

Breaking of Nations: Order and chaos in the twenty-first century (London: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003).

³⁸ Gallagher (2017); Epstein et al (this SI, 2018).

processes of achieving state-subjectivity that all states experience and fail to experience.

The second problem – about how to use ideas about individuals to understand states – is a perennial one for IR.³⁹ There are various ways of addressing it. Hegel gives us a starting point, in his understanding of the dialectic being inherent at various levels – as Epstein et al point out, Hegel saw the master-slave dialectic within the individual, and between individuals, each mediating the other.⁴⁰

Already underpinning this discussion is the notion that interpersonal relationships resonate with internal psychic processes, an idea that Klein also explores explicitly in discussions about the relationships between objects.⁴¹

Scaling up further one might point to work on the way groups underwrite individual subjectivity and wellbeing.⁴² The degree to which a group of which one is a member is able to assert itself and to elicit recognition in the world, is an essential source of individual stability and coherence. There is work on recognition in IR that already explores this – most notably Greenhill and Neumann who each discuss the ways in which one group's relationship to other groups helps support its members' sense of themselves as distinct from and

³⁹ Alexander Wendt, 'The State as a Person in International Theory' *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004), pp. 289–316.

⁴⁰ Epstein et al (this SI, 2018).

⁴¹ Klein (1998a)

⁴² Wilfred Bion, *Experiences in Groups and other Papers*, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974).

related to other groups through relationships of recognition.⁴³ Group – or state – subjectivity emerges in this way, an idea explored for example in the struggle for recognition of minority groups.⁴⁴

A further way to address it might be to think about how individual leaders of groups embody and express the collective – how in their performance of it, they bring into being a collective consciousness. This is particularly apposite to understanding how post-colonial states become reified in their early years, as they rely heavily on their heads of state speaking and enacting statehood.⁴⁵

Nkrumah, like many post-independence leaders, took on a particularly important role in the absence of established state and broader institutions. In articulating and enacting what Ghana was, Nkrumah was able to birth his state's self-consciousness by performing it.⁴⁶

⁴³ Greenhill (2008); Iver Neumann, *Uses of the Other In World Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁴⁴ For an overview see Amy Gutman (ed), *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁴⁵ Wallerstein, for example, argues that new states don't have the 'residual loyalty' of citizens and need a dominant party and a charismatic leader to embody and enact unity. Immanuel Wallerstein (1961), *Africa, the Politics of Independence* (New York, Random House), p. 87.

⁴⁶ Apter describes Nkrumah acting as the 'nucleus of unity' for Ghana as it attempted to create new institutions and abolish old ones. David Apter, *Ghana in Transition* (New York, Atheneum), p. 274. Kwaku Larbi Korang, in a fascinating

In exploring the words and deeds of its leader, I hope to explain the emergence of a new state. Most of the rest of the article discusses Nkrumah's ideas from his key text, *Africa Must Unite*, published in 1963, a passionate and 'most cogent'⁴⁷ call for pan-Africanism.⁴⁸ As we have seen, Nkrumah described his powerful sense of Ghana as a 'new entity', a fragile, new-born state, at its independence. It might have been useful for Nkrumah to portray it in this way – to write off the pre-colonial history that he saw as rather backward and irrelevant to modern statehood, along with the legacies of a racist colonial state – but there was also undeniably a substantive issue of Ghana as a new country that had both to understand its new selfhood, and become an actor in the world – to achieve 'self-

discussion of Nkrumah's depiction of his early life, shows how he portrayed himself as both embodiment and enabler of the emergence of Ghana as a 'self-nation in a universal modernity that still kept faith with its own nature'. Kwaku Larbi Korang, *Writing Ghana, imagining Africa: nation and African modernity* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2004).

⁴⁷ Ama Biney 'The Legacy of Kwame Nkrumah in Retrospect' *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2:3, 2008, pp. 129-59, p. 136

⁴⁸ Nkrumah read widely and wrote prolifically during his time in power. Although some of his writing was achieved in collaboration and written by others, the ideas in his books were clearly his. On Nkrumah's writings and thought, see: Biney (2011) and Immanuel Wallerstein 'Implicit Ideology in Africa: a review of books by Kwame Nkrumah' *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 11:4, 1967, pp. 518-22; p. 519.

consciousness' and agency. Nkrumah describes this problem very clearly, and addresses it by weaving together the international and the domestic in an attempt to bring about a Ghanaian identity.

A new African state

Nkrumah published *Africa must Unite* in 1963, 11 years after he became prime minister under the transition from British rule, and six years after independence. This far into his rule and only three years from his own fall, one cannot help feeling that much of his description of domestic Ghana is built on an appreciation of the real mess the country was getting into,⁴⁹ and reflects too the fact that Nkrumah was by this time quite obviously turning to international affairs for relief.⁵⁰ In it, he describes the first years of a fragile new state. Nkrumah puts international relationships at the centre of his understanding of Ghanaian statehood. How far and in what ways these constitute relationships of recognition is a question I will come to later. In this section I discuss Nkrumah's description of Ghana at independence and think through how far it might be characterised as 'paranoid-schizoid' or 'pre-subjective'.

⁴⁹ For a detailed account of Ghana's decline under Nkrumah, see Roger Gocking, *The History of Ghana* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ David Rooney, *Kwame Nkrumah: the political kingdom in the Third World* (London: I B Tauris, 1988). Nkrumah's drive towards centralised control can also be read in the context of his increasingly narrow options in the face of economic crisis. Birmingham (1998).

Nkrumah's understanding of an infant Ghana emerges through descriptions of Ghanaians as immature and of Ghana as fractured and unintegrated. The language he uses paints Ghana as chaotic and schizoid. His main preoccupation is how to create a centralised state that can put it all together. I suggest that Nkrumah describes the state as the nation's ego, emerging to contain and make sense of its messy incoherence.

We have seen already how Nkrumah describes a 'denuded' state without 'bearings'.⁵¹ It was not only the removal of traces of colonial administration that created this 'discontinuity', but the powerful sense that Ghanaian people were themselves disconnected from the modern world, incapable of modern subjecthood. He wrote:

Tribal society, counting little but sunrise, sunset and the moon's apogee, welcomed these festive breaks in the monotony of passing days, and has carried over the customs to the present, where another more stirring philosophy needs to induce industriousness and thrift.⁵²

Unlike other African nationalist leaders (Julius Nyerere in Tanganyika, for example), he was not interested in restoring lost African virtues: here, he viewed

⁵¹ Nkrumah (1998) p. xiv.

⁵² Nkrumah (1998) p. 105.

the modernisation of his subjects as essential.⁵³ The people, he argues 'have to be completely reanimated'.⁵⁴ This idea of a death- or zombie-like state invokes an eerie, resonant emptiness. In Nkrumah's description, the people are immersed, dream-like, in a pre-modern state of nature, mechanically rather than actively responsive to the rhythms of the moon and the sun, while Nkrumah himself appears to be the only one awake, bent on giving them consciousness.

Ghana was of course not empty, and not without a history, not least in its colonial past. But this was an uncomfortable legacy. Elsewhere, Nkrumah describes it as leaving Ghanaians troubled and uncertain, disconnected from their roots, forced into copying an identity that was not theirs.⁵⁵

The country's identity crisis was underlined by what Nkrumah saw as its internal fragmentation. This anxiety was not just Nkrumah's: the idea of the new African countries in chaotic pieces was a favourite theme of academics and statesmen at

⁵³ Nyerere writes of a natural African socialism and advocates its revival rather than a turn to Western forms. Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: essays on socialism* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968). Nkrumah was less emphatically anti-tradition in some of his later work, arguing for a 'scientific working out' of traditional forms of African egalitarianism. Kwame Nkrumah, 'African Socialism Revisited' in *Africa: National and Social Revolution* (Prague: Peace and Socialism Publishers, 1967).

⁵⁴ Nkrumah (1998) p. 107.

⁵⁵ Kwame Nkrumah (1964).

the time. Zolberg described them as 'syncretic' and liable to violent fracture;⁵⁶ Marcum as fragmented into a 'host of petty states', threatened by internal 'centrifugal forces' and 'particularist loyalties';⁵⁷ and later Mamdani called them 'bifurcated', comprising members with entirely different conceptions of the state and their relation to it.⁵⁸ It was generally assumed at African independence that the divisive legacies of colonialism, along with the stresses of containing ethnic pluralities within straightened economic circumstances, would put enormous strain on states with feeble capacities, and that division, conflict and fragmentation were inevitable. Such primordial forces presented the new states with a mess of contradictory drives that threatened to undo their ambitions to both represent and act for all the people – to establish a collective subject-hood.

Nkrumah certainly appears to feel their challenge to state authority. He describes division as one of his biggest threats. The British he argues, had sewn the germs of disunity in their parting constitutional arrangements that enshrined a devolution of powers. These protected the power of regional chiefs who were bent on frustrating the government's modernisation programme. The opposition

⁵⁶ Aristide Zolberg, 'The structure of political conflict in the new states of tropical Africa' *American Political Science Review* LXII:1, 1968, pp. 70–87.

⁵⁷ John Marcum 'Pan-Africanism: present and future' in *American Society of African Culture* (ed) *Pan-Africanism Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 53-65; p. 53–4.

⁵⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of later colonialism* (London, James Currey, 1996).

parties, he believed, were 'narrowly regional in concept, and often violent, abusive and terroristic in action',⁵⁹ the immature population 'amenable to demagogic appeals and readily exploitable by eloquence that arouses the emotions rather than reason'.⁶⁰ The ground, he says, 'was well laid for the promotion of disunity and fragmentation'.⁶¹ He concludes: 'We were engaged in a kind of war, a war against poverty and disease, against ignorance, against tribalism and disunity. We were fighting to construct.'⁶²

Nkrumah's understanding of the role of the new state then was to turn a fragmented, chaotic and undeveloped country into a coherent whole. Here the state begins to look like the country's fragile ego, attempting to establish stability and coherence in a struggle against confusion. And, much in the way Klein describes the work in this direction done by an individual's fragile ego, coherence is constructed around a rigid, idealised sense of a unitary, omnipotent selfhood. Nkrumah set about his task by trying to establish a centralised economy and political system.⁶³ 'Our over-all planning,' he writes, 'will be

⁵⁹ Nkrumah (1998) p. 68.

⁶⁰ Nkrumah (1998) p. 72.

⁶¹ Nkrumah (1998) p. 62.

⁶² Nkrumah (1998) p. 74.

⁶³ Maxwell Owusu, *Uses and Abuses of Political Power: a case study of continuity and change in the politics of Ghana* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Here, Nkrumah was adopting the prevailing economic philosophy of the day – in Africa and beyond. A centralised economy focused on industrial growth, was the

designed to unify and discipline economic activity... Control from the top must ensure that individual executives and administrators do not misinterpret policy and instructions and break out of the co-ordinated pattern with the introduction of improvised schemes.'⁶⁴ The result would be a country of complete unity, a country in which the 'aspirations of the people and the economic and social objectives of the government are synonymous'⁶⁵ while the trade unions' aims are 'identified with those of the government', something that 'weds them to active participation in the carrying out of the government's programme'.⁶⁶

On one level, this rhetoric was an attempt by Nkrumah to justify his moves to centralise power, to crack down on the opposition and media, and to 'reform' the power of the chiefs ('crush' might be a more appropriate word, according to Rathbone).⁶⁷ Many African post-independence governments used such arguments to institute one-party states or to wage war against secessionist or dissatisfied factions. Yet from beneath the practical, materially-focused drive for unity, comes an anxiety that provides a different angle on Nkrumah's rigid

norm in the 1960s and pursued by socialist and capitalist African regimes alike.

See Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (eds), *International Development and the Social Sciences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁶⁴ Nkrumah (1998) p. 122.

⁶⁵ Nkrumah (1998) p. 126.

⁶⁶ Nkrumah (1998) p. 126-7.

⁶⁷ Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: the politics of chieftancy in Ghana 1951-60* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).

insistence on conformity. Austin makes an interesting point that Nkrumah had an 'extreme emotional attitude to power', which he translated into an 'Nkrumaist cult'. In this way he was able to portray his call for centralisation as a popular cause.⁶⁸ Nkrumah paints a vivid picture of what a new-born state feels like – and the picture is a topsy-turvy one of internal fragmentation, alienation and dubious collective selfhood. He could describe the role of the state as the force that would pull it together, create the selfhood that would establish Ghana's 'dignity, progress and prosperity'.⁶⁹ In such circumstances, a centralised state, with unambiguous objects and whose constituent parts worked harmoniously together, appears to protect against the anxieties both for the future of the country and those living in it.

The allure of a heavily centralised state that could hold it all together went beyond elites. This was evidenced in Ghana in Nkrumah's enormous electoral popularity in the early years,⁷⁰ but it proved to be a feature of most newly-emerging African states as they reached independence.⁷¹ Here we can point to

⁶⁸ Dennis Austin (1964) *Politics in Ghana 1946-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 41.

⁶⁹ Nkrumah (1998) p. 221.

⁷⁰ Apter (1968).

⁷¹ Dorman, for example, writes of a very similar tendency in Zimbabwe, achieving independence more than 20 years after Ghana, where a variety of civil society groups worked alongside the government to suppress division and dissent in the interests of the unity of the new nation. Sara Dorman,

Klein's argument about the role of omnipotence fantasies in providing reassurance in the paranoid-schizoid state. Surrounded by anxiety and fragmentation, a firm central figure, utterly in control, provides a sense of stability, no matter how ephemeral and weakly rooted. Apter gives us a powerful sense of how Nkrumah used his charisma to contain anxiety: 'For each group, Nkrumah could make things "all right"... His charisma became a vessel into which all authority flowed.'⁷² For Boateng, Nkrumah's charismatic persona was built on implicit comparisons with Jesus.⁷³

Relationships with the wider world

Here, I am going to discuss how Nkrumah achieved his picture of coherence and stability through his international relationships. This is a story in which the fantasy of internal consistence and control are played out in the wider world; idealised internal objects are split and projected onto external objects that now appear to conform to Nkrumah's own certainties.

The domestic scene in Ghana was, by 1963, far from coherent and stable and as Rooney puts it: 'As local political problems mounted, the party apparatus

Understanding Zimbabwe: from liberation to authoritarianism (London: Hurst, 2016).

⁷² Apter (1968), p. 779.

⁷³ Charles Adom Boateng, *The Political Legacy of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003) pp. 8-11.

stressed [Nkrumah's] role as a great African leader.'⁷⁴ In other words, Nkrumah attempted to pull fractured Ghana together through his international policies. However, the enormous gap between domestic chaos and international fantasy could only be bridged through an adventurous creativity. Nkrumah was an enormously charismatic figure and an object of popular hero-worship, something that is both described and embodied in the work of his assistant and biographer June Milne.⁷⁵ His vision of Ghana, which he frequently depicted through its international relationships, and most powerfully in his pursuit of a united Africa, highlights his huge talent for political vision and rhetoric. According to Wallerstein, this vision encapsulated an ideology shared across most of the African intelligentsia at the time.⁷⁶

We are looking at a fantasised Ghana constructed through misrecognition; of Ghana's imagined friends and enemies, and how these ultimately feed back into Ghana's sense of itself. The misrecognition of external objects is inseparable from a misrecognised self and this is because these external objects emerge from flattened idealised internal objects that have been split apart and projected in order to establish a sense of certainty and control. In *Africa must Unite*, Nkrumah argues for two types of relationship for African countries: those with the West,

⁷⁴ Rooney (1988).

⁷⁵ June Milne, Kwame Nkrumah – a biography (London: Panaf, 2000)

⁷⁶ Wallerstein (1967); see also Joseph G Amamoo, The Ghanaian Revolution (London: Jafint Co Publishers, 1988).

and those with each other. These relationships are polarised – they are ‘split’ in Kleinian terminology: the first is with a dangerous and aggressive other, and the second is with an ideal non-other. These are unambiguous relationships offering a stark dichotomy of actors in Ghana’s wider world.⁷⁷

The relationship with the West – particularly the former colonial power – must be one of complete repudiation. Nkrumah wrote his book before Fanon’s work was translated into English,⁷⁸ but he similarly traces ideas about the need to fight back (albeit non-violently) against colonial subjection in order to assert selfhood.⁷⁹ In the economic sphere, African economies had been designed to

⁷⁷ The argument that these were idealised by Nkrumah – that I make below – does not mean there was no substance to his perceptions of international friends and enemies. Ghana’s fragile economy was, like many other African economies, too small and too focused on its colonial dependence to have much hope of making it without substantial pan-African cooperation. Likewise, Nkrumah’s analysis of a malevolent West was rooted in the fact of Cold War anxieties and heavy-handed or illegal interventions in new states that were thought to be going the ‘wrong way’ ideologically.

⁷⁸ Franz Fanon’s book, *Black Skin, White Masks* was published in French in 1952, and in English in 1967. His, *The Wretched of the Earth* in French in 1961 and in English in 1963.

⁷⁹ Nkrumah was similar to Fanon in that he ‘advocated for a theory of decolonisation rooted in a dialectic of destruction and rebirth’. Ahlman (2017) p. 11.

service European needs, and the world's markets were stacked to maintain dependent relationships. Like many of his contemporaries, Nkrumah argues for self-sufficiency – autonomy – from the West if African states are to achieve economic viability. Politically, too, he argues against some of his Francophone colleagues who were entering independence while maintaining close ties to France.⁸⁰ Such a state of affairs will not, he argues, deliver true independence to Africa. He sees a 'Machiavellian danger' in the Western powers,⁸¹ arguing that a total break with Europe is essential to help Africans establish material, ideological and emotional independence.

The superpowers, he argues, are 'seeking to make Africa a warground of contending interests' and the Europeans, through the creation of trade zones, are 'planning our balkanization'.⁸² He warns against the lure of the European Development Fund.⁸³ It is inadequate for the industrialisation needs of Africa,

⁸⁰ The former French colonies were vigorously wooed by Charles de Gaulle. Nkrumah's references to 'balkanisation' were made in answer to de Gaulle's breaking up of French west Africa, and his plans to keep French-speaking colonies under close French patronage after independence. See Birmingham (1998).

⁸¹ Nkrumah (1998) p. 193.

⁸² Nkrumah (1998) p. 193.

⁸³ 'Created in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome and launched in 1959, the European Development Fund (EDF) is the EU's main instrument for providing

and amounts to a 'special plea for collective colonialism of a new order'.⁸⁴ Better to create economic independence. Nkrumah's greatest anxiety is that 'the imperialist powers, fishing in the muddy waters of communalism, tribalism and sectional interests, endeavour to create fissions in the national front, in order to achieve fragmentation'.⁸⁵ The danger of engagement with the West, therefore, is one of exacerbated internal fracture and division.

In this, Nkrumah presents a clear connection between disruptive division internally – bad internal objects – and disruptive external forces – bad external objects. He links these objects together as a way to explain, and jettison, messy ambiguity at home: it is now all identified with a malevolent West. Ghana, and all Africa, can only clear the 'muddy waters' by cutting itself off. The mud itself is dissipated through this projection: stuck now to the West, it can be seen more clearly and apparently dealt with more straightforwardly. Nkrumah's fantasy of complete autonomy from the West rang hollow, as we shall see later. But as a signifier of the sense of control and independent statehood it was exemplary.

development aid to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and to overseas countries and territories (OCTs).'

(www.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/funding-instruments-programming/funding-instruments/european-development-fund_en – cited 15 February 2017).

⁸⁴ Nkrumah (1998) p. 160.

⁸⁵ Nkrumah (1998) p. 173.

But equally important for Nkrumah, and the cause around which he constructed a powerful idealisation, was a completely different type of relationship, embodied in the idea of pan-Africanism.⁸⁶ Here, instead of a relationship of total rejection, we see a relationship of complete submersion, in which Ghana is part of 'a glorious tree of union and brotherhood among the peoples of Africa'.⁸⁷

Pan-Africanism as an intellectual tradition began in the African-American and Caribbean diaspora in the early 20th century, and focused on the idea of a reclamation of African identity for people who had been uprooted and deprived of selfhood. Edward Blyden's 'Back to Black', an early articulation, expressed the idea of an essential common African identity 'forged in the common experience of racism'.⁸⁸ According to Raymond Suttner, other pan-Africanists looked further back, proposing that the 'oneness' amongst all people of African descent, related 'to the alleged intrinsic character of the African spirit... based on an "imaginary consensus" that is claimed to have prevailed in Africa prior to conquest'.⁸⁹ This

⁸⁶ Gocking (2005).

⁸⁷ Nkrumah (1998) p. 86.

⁸⁸ Mcebisi Ndletyana (2014) 'Pan Africanism in South Africa: confluence of local origin and diasporic inspiration', Peter Vale, Lawrence Hamilton and Estelle Prinsloo (eds) *Intellectual Traditions in South Africa: ideas, individuals and institutions* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014): pp. 146–72

⁸⁹ Raymond Suttner, 'African Nationalism' in Vale et al (2014), pp. 121–45; pp. 136–7.

idea was embodied in the 'African personality' that Africans had been deprived of through slavery and colonialism.⁹⁰ It was sometimes equated with African philosophies about the individual's embeddedness in the whole: 'Man become integral parts of one other (sic). The group, no longer a collection of entities, is substantively interrelated.'⁹¹ Africans' 'return' was often literal too – Marcus Garvey, whose influence was at its height in the 1920s and 1930s, advocated the 'Back to Africa' movement, promoted through the practical means of the Black Star Shipping Company which he helped establish. African-Americans could 'return home' to Liberia and Ethiopia (the uncolonised parts of Africa at the time).

From America and the Caribbean, no doubt, for people whose ancestors had been violently removed from their context, Africa could look like an undifferentiated mass. Blackness and an origin in Africa were what united the proponents of pan-Africanism. 'Africa' was a fantasy homeland, an ideal alternative to the violent and unwelcoming Americas. Nkrumah and other nationalist African leaders who studied in the US and Europe in the 1940s and 1950s engaged with these ideas – perhaps also seeing 'Africa' in a new light from the position of a homesick migrant. The idea also provided them with a powerful

⁹⁰ Alioune Diop, 'Remarks on African personality and negritude', American Society of African Culture (ed) *Pan-Africanism Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 327–45.

⁹¹ George E. Carter, 'Traditional African Social Thought', American Society of African Culture, 1962, pp. 255–66; p. 261.

ideological and political objective, a 'club' enabling 'intimate interaction and collaboration'.⁹² Nkrumah became heavily involved in the pan-African movement in London.⁹³ He came to believe that real independence for African countries was impossible without continental political union. He saw himself, the leader of the first African country to achieve independence, at the forefront of this campaign moving, he hoped, towards a United States of Africa. Copies of *Africa must Unite* were handed out to delegates at the meeting to establish the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Adaba in 1963 'in the hope that any members who were not yet convinced of the need for unification would absorb the overwhelming case for unity by reading the book'.⁹⁴

Nkrumah's book is saturated with the themes of African 'oneness' and 'African personality'. When he talks about his relationships with other African leaders, he is describing a meeting of minds and ideas, far more than in his descriptions of domestic relationships. Like the pan-Africanist Americans, he appears to find his 'home' in 'Africa'.

In meeting fellow Africans from all parts of the continent I am constantly impressed by how much we have in common. It is not just our colonial past,

⁹² Apter and Coleman (1962), pp. 88–9.

⁹³ Nkrumah was one of the main organisers of the fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945: see Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited* (London: New Beacon Books, 1995).

⁹⁴ Milne (2000) p. 96.

or the fact that we have aims in common, it is something which goes far deeper. I can best describe it as a sense of one-ness in that we are

Africans.⁹⁵

As other African states gained independence, Nkrumah began to work for African union. With his closest allies Guinea and Mali he formed the 'nucleus of the United States of Africa' in 1960, exchanging cabinet ministers with Guinea, and working on the principles of pan-Africanism that would harmonise foreign, defence and economic policy and work towards the 'rehabilitation and development of African culture'.⁹⁶ The practical objectives of these policies, designed to bring about 'unalloyed unity',⁹⁷ would be to eradicate economic competition and pool resources.

Nkrumah thus translated his desire for Ghanaian unity and harmony onto the whole continent. His idealised coherent internal object had a corresponding idealised coherent external object to relate to. With delight he describes how '[o]ur conferences have been characterized by an identity of view on most of the problems examined and an atmosphere of perfect understanding'.⁹⁸ He writes:

⁹⁵ Nkrumah (1998) p. 132.

⁹⁶ Nkrumah (1998) p. 142.

⁹⁷ Nkrumah (1998) p. 185.

⁹⁸ Nkrumah (1998) p. 143.

To us, Africa with its islands is just one Africa. We reject the idea of any kind of partition. From Tangier or Cairo in the North to Capetown in the South, from Cape Guardafui in the East to Cape Verde Islands in the West, Africa is one and indivisible.⁹⁹

The realisation of these plans will, he believes, eliminate 'those acquisitive tendencies which lead to sectional conflicts within society',¹⁰⁰ and in time be translated onto the wider international stage:

[A]ll Africa will speak with one concerted voice. With union, our example of a multiple of peoples living and working for mutual development in amity and peace will point the way for the smashing of the inter-territorial barriers existing elsewhere, and give a new meaning to the concept of human brotherhood. A Union of African States will raise the dignity of Africa and strengthen its impact on world affairs. It will make possible the full expression of the African personality.¹⁰¹

Nkrumah is describing the seamless submersion of Ghana into the larger entity of Africa. He extends his ideas about harmony and unity within Ghana to a harmony and unity across the continent, whereby every African can feel a complete oneness with every other African and on this larger stage, he feels he

⁹⁹ Nkrumah (1998) p. 217.

¹⁰⁰ Nkrumah (1998) p. 171.

¹⁰¹ Nkrumah (1998) p. 193.

has found it, far more easily than he is managing at home. This is a description of Hegel's idea of the desire for complete 'oneness' with the other. It is also an idealised projective identification which posits an Africa entirely shaped in imagination, one that presents no sense of disturbing difference, but one too that can apparently represent the united homogenous Ghana he is trying to bring into being.

Ghanaian statehood, coherent, unified and acting, emerges in Nkrumah's conceptualisation as resting on a complete repudiation of a violent aggressive other; and a complete submersion into an idealised other which is so closely identified with as to cease being properly other. Nkrumah captured the uncertainty of the fragile new state in the way he juxtaposes it in relation to these two extremes which, in Kleinian fashion, represent split internal objects, projected onto idealised good and bad external objects. But he has also managed to contain it, to pitch it as 'concrete' amidst this array of polarised certainties.

The outside world he has created, built on fantasies of omnipotence, autonomy, control and perfection is clearly misrecognised. Just as the relationships at home are deeply fractured and fraught, so Ghana's international relationships were more ambiguous. But these fantasies were I think necessary for the fledgling state. They enabled it to begin to explain itself, both to itself and to the wider world, to establish an illusion of agency through its ideas about what it was and its ability to act. Nkrumah's self-idealisation, linked to these idealised external objects, also established a profound self-misrecognition of Ghana – as important, as capable, as powerful. This all came crashing down around him in a few short

years, and yet it had set Ghana on the path towards more grounded forms of recognition.

Misrecognition, recognition and state-making

Nkrumah's international relationships were not based on recognition which, as Hegel and Klein suggest, is rooted in a relation with ambiguity. I want to show now how this misrecognition disintegrated and laid the foundations for more solid forms of recognition and grounded selfhood.

Nkrumah's fall was brutal, and hugely popular in Ghana. The announcement of the coup that ousted him in 1966 was greeted with widespread celebration and he died in exile in 1972.¹⁰² There are many accounts of Nkrumah's fall and its causes – domestic and international. Nkrumah himself wrote: 'The incident in Ghana is a plot by the imperialists, neo-colonialists and their agents in Africa'.¹⁰³ Hadjor argues that Nkrumah 'kept popular support but was brought down by

¹⁰² Apter writes of 'rejoicing in the streets' at the news of the coup (1968, p. 787) and how 'women chalked their faces and wore white in the villages – traditional symbols of rejoicing' (1968, p. 767). Gocking writes: 'The coup itself was welcomed in Ghana with far more enthusiasm than had been the case for independence... The bars were jammed with celebrants the night after the coup.' Gocking (2005) p. 138. For a detailed account of the key actors involved in the coup, see Simon Baynham, *The Military and Politics in Nkrumah's Ghana* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988).

¹⁰³ Kwame Nkrumah, *Dark Days in Ghana* (London: Panaf Books, 1968), p. 44.

selfish party members' in a 'CIA-backed army coup'¹⁰⁴ and Milne argued that the coup was a creation of 'reactionary forces'.¹⁰⁵ These fit into Nkrumah's broader depiction of the West as the enemy of Ghana, and while there is truth in the assertion that the West was interested in his fall, there is scant evidence that the British or Americans were directly involved in the 1966 coup.¹⁰⁶

Other accounts are more nuanced, situating Nkrumah's dramatic fall from grace within his political failures at home. Feit writes that it was Nkrumah's failure to make the state into a Leviathan capable of containing the divisions and

¹⁰⁴ Kofi Buenor Hajor Nkrumah and Ghana: the dilemma of post-colonial power (London: Kegan Paul International, 1988) p. 87 and p. 99.

¹⁰⁵ Milne (2000).

¹⁰⁶ First details the ways in which the US and European powers worked to undermine Nkrumah, and to support the regime that replaced him, but her account suggests that while they might have hoped for a coup, and supported it when it occurred, they did not mastermind it. Ruth First, *The Barrel of a Gun: political power in Africa and the coup d'etat in Africa* (London: Allen Lane, 1970). In 1978 a former CIA operative, Johri Stockwell claimed in his book *In Search of Enemies* that the CIA was pivotal in the coup. However his account is confused and unconvincing. I'm inclined to believe, along with Rooney, that the CIA was clearly 'well briefed' on the coup plans, and supportive of them, but 'they did not actually set the coup in motion or take part'. Rooney (1988) p. 254. They didn't need to. As others have pointed out, the coup didn't need external direction: there was plenty of domestic opposition to Nkrumah.

alternative power sources that caused the problems. He was easily put aside; his regime was 'little more than [a] shadow'.¹⁰⁷ Owusu argues that Nkrumah's credibility rested on his ability to deliver the economic growth he had promised, and that as this failed to emerge, he faced overwhelming political pressure.¹⁰⁸ By 1963 it was clear that despite huge efforts, the economy was in terrible shape. Nkrumah's ambitious and expensive industrialisation projects, designed to overcome Ghana's dependence on cocoa exports, were struggling, goods were scarce, unemployment and prices were rising, and there was a severe balance of payments crisis.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Edward Feit (1968) 'Military Coups and Political Development: Some Lessons from Ghana and Nigeria' *World Politics*, 20:2, pp. 179-193; p. 180.

¹⁰⁸ Owusu (1970).

¹⁰⁹ There is a large literature on Ghana's economic misfortunes under Nkrumah. On Nkrumah's commitment to ambitious industrialisation schemes, and the economic and political problems it produced, in particular the Volta River Project, see Gocking (2005); Stephanie Decker 'Corporate political activity in less developed countries: the Volta River Project in Ghana, 1958-66' *Business History* 57(7) (2011) pp. 993-1017; and Boateng (2003). Some scholars have criticised Nkrumah's 'ambivalence about Western domination of resources' and weak implementation rather than bad policy (for example, Harcourt Fuller, *Building the Ghanaian nation-state: Kwame Nkrumah's symbolic nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) p. 56). More critical accounts focus on his 'casualness and ignorance' in relation to economics (Trevor Jones, *Ghana's First Republic: the pursuit of the political kingdom* (London: Methuen, 1976) p. 143). For a

In his novel *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born* the Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah, a critic of the regime, provides a moving account of the rapid decline of Ghana's economy under Nkrumah, illustrating the depression that gripped the country by the mid-1960s.¹¹⁰ Economic crisis caused by the crippling constraints created by foreign interests and economic mismanagement coupled with rising unpopularity created by Nkrumah's repressive domestic measures to curb union discontent and clamp down on dissidents spread a film of decay and corruption. Armah's novel shows the dramatic change from the elation he inspired in his early speeches, to the quiet despair that emerged later. The novel opens with a description of zombie-like commuters stumbling their way to work in the dark through a city strewn with detritus and decay. Armah turns Nkrumah's idea of animating Ghanaians upside-down, suggesting he turned them into hapless sleepwalkers.

According to Birmingham, it was the increasing disconnect between such disturbing domestic realities and the pan-African dream that caused Nkrumah's

broader account of the various causes of economic decline, despite the huge investment of his government's 'big push', see Tony Killick, *Development Economics in Action: a study of the economic policies in Ghana* (London: Heinemann, 1978).

¹¹⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1969)

unpopularity.¹¹¹ He was forced to defend his generous financial support for impoverished Guinea, which had even more emphatically cast off European patronage¹¹² while Ghanaians themselves struggled with economic hardship. His deployment of troops in Congo in 1960 to support the besieged regime there showed up the inadequacies of Ghana's military capacity and led to the humiliation of its officers. A lavish banquet thrown in Accra for visiting heads of state in 1965 to promote pan-Africanism was a 'disaster', creating the impression of a leader oblivious to suffering and poverty at home, and a failure in terms of objectives of closer international cooperation. The last straw for military leaders was Nkrumah's plan to deploy troops in Rhodesia at the Universal Declaration of Independence in 1965: unable to stomach more badly-planned foreign adventures, the officers acted. 'Pan-African idealism brought Nkrumah's final ruin', says Birmingham.¹¹³

Pan-Africanism – like the repudiation of the West – had always been a fantasy. Nkrumah's first pan-Africa meeting in Accra in 1957 had been an 'electrifying gathering', but from 1960, when other African countries began to achieve independence, differences with Nkrumah's vision began to emerge.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Birmingham (1998).

¹¹² Donal Cruise O'Brien, *Symbolic Confrontations: Muslims imagining the state in Africa* (London: Hurst, 2003).

¹¹³ Birmingham (1998), p. 109.

¹¹⁴ Gocking (2005) p. 126.

Dissent from the 'gradualists',¹¹⁵ grew among most of the Francophone countries which were keen to keep ties with their former colonial power (Leopold Senghor of Senegal and Houphouet Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire, for example, were happy to maintain French trade links, currency and education systems alongside powerful emotional attachments),¹¹⁶ and from leaders who were suspicious of his tendency to assume leadership of the continent, and who jealously guarded their own sovereignty.¹¹⁷ Even in his relations with his closest ally Guinea, attempts to pool sovereignty were undermined by the fact that 'the two countries had no common border, no common language, no common traditions of administration, of defense, of policing, or of foreign relations'¹¹⁸ as well as 'differing external commitments, and rival political ambitions'.¹¹⁹

The relationship with the West was far more complicated too. Nkrumah remained deeply ambivalent towards the West, harbouring an admiration for Britain and a 'love-hate' relationship with America. After a painful debate, he pragmatically accepted English as the language of the state because it was the best way to overcome competition between Ghana's many indigenous languages and from the start he viewed Western investment as essential for his

¹¹⁵ Guy Martin, *African Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹¹⁶ Cruise O'Brien (2003).

¹¹⁷ Gocking (2005); Marcum (1962).

¹¹⁸ Birmingham (1998), p. 103.

¹¹⁹ Marcum (1962), p. 57.

modernisation programme.¹²⁰ He rejected the queen as head of state in 1960, yet remained fascinated by her, seeing her as a 'fairy godmother' figure.¹²¹ And of course, Nkrumah's ardent advocacy of modernisation and industrialisation was rooted in his desire to emulate Western economic success.

Reading *Africa must Unite* alongside contemporary accounts of Ghana like Armah's, one is contemplating a picture of Nkrumah entering into an increasingly detached and frenzied insistence on his idealised view of the wider world, while his compatriots experience their country gently rotting away. This divergence suggests a growing perception of the mismatch between Nkrumah's misrecognised international relationships and the fantasy Ghana he had built on top of them. Misrecognition had reached its limits, as reality testing increasingly broke down clear-cut categories. In Armah's description of miserable decay, we see Ghanaians struggling with a Kleinian 'depressive position', far more aware of their own fragility and state of muddle than their leader whose continued pursuit of fantasy relationships became increasingly manic.

When Colonel E. K. Kotoka announced the removal of Nkrumah's government on Ghana Radio on the morning of the coup he said: 'The myth surrounding Nkrumah has been broken.'¹²² Apter noted that the country felt 'provincial and quiet after Nkrumah, the problems now being confronted as local but real, where

¹²⁰ Fuller (2014).

¹²¹ Birmingham (1998), p. 129.

¹²² Quoted in Rooney (1988) p. 251.

before they were grandiose and unreal'. Politics were now about 'the practical and the mundane' rather than 'the drama and the opportunity presented by radical politics'.¹²³ Nkrumah took glamour, fantasy and ideas of greatness with him.

Ghanaians now had to engage in relationships with much more ambiguous others upon which they both depended and from which they differed – these would assume relationships grounded in struggles for recognition, anchored in more complex object-relations. The attempts to repudiate the West gave way to more calculated overtures wherein a succession of military leaders attempted to cultivate lucrative relationships, until one of them, Jerry Rawlings, threw his lot entirely in with the Washington Institutions in the 1980s, in his bid to fix the country's troubled economy.¹²⁴ Relationships with other African countries could not be idealised anymore either. Pan-Africanism was not realised in the form that Nkrumah hoped for. He worried in 1963 that 'in the early flush of independence, some of the new African states are jealous of their sovereignty and tend to exaggerate their separatism'.¹²⁵ As Africa's new states began to take

¹²³ Apter (1968) p. 762.

¹²⁴ See D. Green 'Ghana: structural adjustment and state (re)formation', in Villalon and Huxtable (eds) *The African State at a Critical Juncture* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1998); and Richard Jeffries 'Leadership Commitment and Political Opposition to Structural Adjustment in Ghana', in D Rothchild (ed) *Ghana: the political economy of recovery* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1991).

¹²⁵ Nkrumah (1998) p. 148.

shape, they did prefer to make themselves into separate entities. The African Union, successor to the Organisation of African Union that Nkrumah helped establish, continues to frustrate advocates of pan-Africanism. Tim Murithi begins his analysis of 'The African Union at Ten': 'As the African Union marked its tenth anniversary on 9 July 2012, it was still recovering from one of its most public disagreements.'¹²⁶ The organisation remains, he writes, 'at its core, a disparate collection of nation states'.¹²⁷

This seems to me to be a good description of 'a relational dynamic of mutual constitution: the subject contributes to shape the object and the object allows the self to "cognize" itself in it'.¹²⁸ Nkrumah himself could not apparently grasp a Ghana 'immersed in the messiness of life',¹²⁹ but ultimately, by bringing Ghana into being through misrecognition, he enabled it to develop the self-consciousness with which to begin to do so.

Practically, the AU has continued to help shape African states into viable entities. Pan-Africanism remains an underlying ideal – a creative fantasy – while the hammering out of compromise between competing interests at the AU – bumpy, conflictual, irritable – looks more like struggles for recognition. The power of

¹²⁶ Tim Murithi 'The African Union at Ten: an appraisal' *African Affairs* 111:445, 2012, pp. 662–9; p. 662.

¹²⁷ Murithi (2012) p. 668.

¹²⁸ Epstein et al (this SI, 2018) p. XX

¹²⁹ Epstein et al (this SI, 2018) p. XX

Nkrumah's idealised misrecognition is constantly revived by his admirers – and there are many of them in recent years as his reputation as a bold, visionary African leader has been rehabilitated.¹³⁰ Perhaps he, like anything, is easier to idealise from a distance. The combination of these levels is a story of misrecognition – ideas of others that are based on fantasy, copies of internal objects – and flashes of recognition, seen in the more grounded, underlying grasp of others as fuller, more complex and ambiguous objects. Misrecognition in the early years, but an underlying and emerging recognition too: both are part of the creation of Ghana's statehood.

Conclusion

Like other contributors to this SI, I have argued that states achieve subjectivity through struggles for recognition. But my particular argument has been that misrecognition both protects against these struggles and enables, or even drives the pursuit of them. Misrecognition's protective capacity can be found in many other instances of bellicose posturing and populist leadership that projects a world of apparent certainty within which fantasies of omnipotence can flourish, from Mugabe to Brexit to Putin. Misrecognition is not just the preserve of 'infant states'.

¹³⁰ Nkrumah was voted Africa's 'Man of the Millennium' in a BBC World Service Poll in 1999

(http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/highlights/000914_nkrumah.shtml, cited 8 March 2018).

However, when it comes to an 'infant state' like Ghana was in 1957, omnipotence fantasies protect against the acute anxieties raised in a 'paranoid-schizoid' position. Thompson points out that Ghana managed to portray itself as a heavy-weight world player in its early years.¹³¹ This was only possible because it was led by a man of enormous imagination who could encapsulate and project the fantasies of his new country. He made 'being Ghana' possible in the early years because he created a vivid and persuasive fantasy. The Ghana he enabled, built on fantasy, crumbled beneath him, and its collapse drove a new kind of engagement with the wider world, built on a struggle for recognition, that enabled the emergence of a more ambiguous but ultimately more solid statehood – the realization that selfhood rests on the inevitable tension between wanting to be and wanting to be separate from, external objects. This, I suggest, is why the Ghanaian state achieved as a product of Nkrumah's pan-African ideal, rather than in spite of it.

¹³¹ W. Scott Thompson *Ghana's Foreign Policy 1957-1966: diplomacy, ideology, and the new state* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. xvii.