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# **Economic Inequality and Political Imagination in Ghana: J.B. Danquah on Poverty, Land and Community<sup>1</sup>**

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## ABSTRACT

This article reconstructs the discourse on economic inequality in the writings of Ghanaian lawyer, philosopher and politician J.B. Danquah. A focus on economic inequality (broadly defined to include not only the distribution of wealth and income, but also considerations of moral economy, class differentiation and land tenure) allows to challenge simplistic characterisations of Danquah as a champion of individualism and free markets, and provides an entry point into the entanglements of economic and political thought in colonial and early postcolonial Ghana. The article argues that Danquah’s reflection on economic inequality fulfilled three functions. Firstly, it indexed his attempts to theorise a social order characterised by a harmonious complementarity of individualism and communitarianism. Secondly, it shaped his critique of colonial and postcolonial state intervention in the cocoa industry. Finally, it underpinned Danquah’s commitment to disentangle Akan land tenure institutions from Eurocentric stadial histories. Through these discursive threads, Danquah contested colonial and postcolonial rulers, reappropriated notions of ‘socialism’ and ‘liberalism’, and mobilised indigenous cultures and institutions to imagine Ghana’s future.

**Keywords:** J.B. Danquah; Ghana; liberalism; economic inequality; community; land tenure

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## 1. Introduction

Following the publication of Thomas Piketty's *Le Capital au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, economic inequality is once again at the forefront of the agenda in the humanities and the social sciences.<sup>2</sup> Most historical studies on economic inequality, in Africa as elsewhere, focus on measuring changing distributions of income and wealth over time.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, most intellectual histories of economic inequality focus on measurement and quantification.<sup>4</sup> Yet, there is much more to economic inequality than its measurement: as acknowledged by Piketty himself, it is crucial to examine inequality's intellectual and ideological underpinnings.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the emergence of a discourse on economic inequality is historically inseparable from issues of class and redistribution, and of 'moral economy', in which the categories of 'rich' and 'poor', and their relationship, are defined and negotiated.<sup>6</sup> Economic inequality is also a powerful entry point into how historical actors in the Global South have conceptualised their position in an 'uneven world'.<sup>7</sup> Seen through this lens, the intellectual history of economic inequality is a promising avenue to explore how political and economic communities are subject to critical scrutiny and re-imagined.<sup>8</sup> Building on these insights, this article reconstructs the evolution of the discourse on economic inequality in the writings of Ghanaian lawyer, philosopher and politician Joseph Boakye Danquah (1895-1965).

The history of contemporary Ghanaian political thought is often told as that of two antithetic traditions.<sup>9</sup> The first allegedly draws inspiration from Kwame Nkrumah's socialism

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<sup>2</sup> Piketty, *Le Capital*. For a survey of inequality in the history of economic thought, and the reasons for this prolonged neglect, see Alacevich and Soci, *Inequality* (especially chapters 1-3).

<sup>3</sup> On Ghana, see Aboagye and Bolt, "Long-term Trends"; Galli, Theodoridis and Rönnbäck, "Economic Inequality" provides a useful comparative survey.

<sup>4</sup> See for examples Ramos Pinto and Paidipaty (eds.), *The Measure of Inequality*.

<sup>5</sup> Piketty, *Capital et Idéologie*.

<sup>6</sup> Tawney, *Equality*; Thompson, "The Moral Economy"; Tribe, "Inequality".

<sup>7</sup> Christiansen, "The Making of *Global Inequality*".

<sup>8</sup> Reid-Henry, *Political Origins of Inequality*; Thompson, *The Politics of Inequality*.

<sup>9</sup> This narrative, mobilised by the National Democratic Congress and New Patriotic Party (the two main parties in Ghana) hides many crucial ideological, economic and ethnic issues underpinning party presence and electoral performance in different parts of Ghana.

and anti-imperialism.<sup>10</sup> Already in 1948, the constitution of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) aimed at 'abolishing imperialism, colonialism, racialism, tribalism, and all forms of national and racial oppression and *economic inequality* among nations, races and peoples and to support all action for World peace'.<sup>11</sup> In later writings, Nkrumah denounced the gap between formal political independence and continued economic oppression, and thus provided both a scathing denunciation of neocolonialist tools and strategies, and advanced an alternative strategy of epistemic, political and economic liberation.<sup>12</sup> Far from being confined to Ghana, Nkrumah's ideas and legacies played a significant role in refashioning ideas of dependency, global inequality and anti-imperialism in the Atlantic world and the Global South.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the 'Danquah-Busia-Dombo' tradition is seen as more free market oriented in economic affairs, and associated with the defence of 'traditional' political cultures. While scholarly interest in this intellectual lineage has remained largely confined to West African studies, histories of liberalism and neoliberalism tend to ignore the contribution of African intellectuals.<sup>14</sup> This article is built on the assumption that J.B. Danquah's writings are simultaneously a window onto the specificities of the Ghanaian context, and a privileged locus to observe the varied intellectual repertoires and political implications of thinking about economic inequality. In the Ghanaian public sphere, Danquah has been subjected to a simplistic appraisal by both friends and foes. The former describe him as the martyr of true freedom and democracy; the latter as the expression of an elitist politics detached from – and oblivious to – the needs of the toiling masses, or as a terrorist who, working with the CIA, was committed to overthrow and kill

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<sup>10</sup> Other commentators stress that, in Ghanaian political discourse, two traditions were already visible by the 1920s, Adu Boahen, *The Ghanaian Sphynx*, 63.

<sup>11</sup> Nkrumah, *Ghana*, Appendix A, 291 (my italics).

<sup>12</sup> See especially Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite; Consciencism; Neocolonialism*.

<sup>13</sup> Adi, "The African Diaspora"; Biney, *Political and Social Thought*; Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire* (especially chapters 3 and 4).

<sup>14</sup> Among Ghanaian political economists, the most prominent representative is George Ayittey. His work is discussed in Austin and Serra, "West Africa", 253, and Guichon, "(Black) Neo-Colonialism".

Nkrumah.<sup>15</sup> Historical accounts have tended to focus on Danquah's vision of constitutionalism and the rule of law, his opposition to Nkrumah, and his impact on what would later become the New Patriotic Party.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the economic ramifications of Danquah's thought have either been ignored, hidden under the most elusive of concepts ('liberalism'), or reduced to an unqualified defence of individualism and a 'free market capitalist ideology'.<sup>17</sup> Even a commentator as sophisticated as the historian Albert Adu Boahen, who studied closely Danquah's work and was, in many ways, his intellectual and political heir, summarised Danquah's ideology as one that 'emphasizes the worth of the individual, individual initiative and individual enterprise; it emphasises the freedom of the individual and not sordid materialism, regimentation and state ownership of property'.<sup>18</sup>

This article argues that the semantic field of economic inequality provides a useful foil to provide a more nuanced view of Danquah's intellectual trajectory. This allows new light to be shed on the continuities and discontinuities in Danquah's economic and political thought, and to interrogate their contexts of mobilisation and their changing political meanings. More importantly, a focus on economic inequality can help inscribe Danquah within wider conversations on the production of African political and economic imaginaries, the mobilisation of categories of 'liberalism' and 'socialism' in colonial and postcolonial contexts, and the articulation of non-Eurocentric historical narratives.

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<sup>15</sup> The Ghanaian press and online forums offer many instances of this dichotomy. Representative examples include, respectively, Amponsah-Bediako, "Relevance of J.B. Danquah" and Botwe-Asamoah, "Fallacies." Danquah's contested place in Ghana's history is also reflected in the controversies over the identity of national founders and commemorative holidays, as discussed in Adotey, "A Matter of Apostrophe?". A fascinating document on the 'beatification' of Danquah following his death is Danquah Funeral Committee, *Danquah: An Immortal*.

<sup>16</sup> Relevant examples include Twumasi, "J.B. Danquah"; Edsman, *Lawyers in Gold Coast*; Okoampa-Ahoofe, Jr. *Dr. J.B. Danquah*; Donkoh Fordwor, *Danquah-Busia Tradition*.

<sup>17</sup> Gyasi Obeng, "Grammatical Pragmatics", 88.

<sup>18</sup> Adu Boahen, *The Ghanaian Sphinx*, 4. Adu Boahen played an invaluable role in advancing the study of Danquah's thought by gathering and editing the texts collected in Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*.

## 2. The moral economy of wealth and poverty

J.B. Danquah was born in Kibi, the capital of the Akan kingdom of Akyem Abuakwa, in 1895. His father served as one of the royal drummers (*atumpakafo*) at the court of king Amoako Atta I, and later became one of the first people in the area to convert to Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Under the tutelage of the Basel Evangelical missionaries, who translated the Bible into Twi in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, he became an evangelist. Danquah's half-brother, born from his father's previous marriage, became king of Akyem (*Okyenhene*) with the name Nana Sir Ofori Atta I, and stayed in power between 1912 and his death in 1943.<sup>20</sup> Danquah's life, and intellectual and political project were profoundly shaped by Christianity and missionary education, and the political culture of the Akyem state. Following missionary schooling and some years of clerical service in Accra and in Kibi (in the latter as Chief Clerk of the Native Court of State), he was sent to London by Ofori Atta to complete his studies. In London he was called to the bar, and completed a PhD in Philosophy on 'The end as moral excellence' after having been awarded the John Stuart Mill scholarship in the Philosophy of Mind and Logic. He returned to Ghana in 1927, where he started practising law in Accra, and devoted much energy to political activity. Between the late 1920s and the 1940s he got involved in the Gold Coast Youth Conference (an institution initially set up by the nationalist J.E. Casely Hayford to promote an alliance between the educated intelligentsia and the 'traditional' chiefs), established a new daily paper, *The Times of West Africa*, and served as member of the Legislative Assembly. In 1947, he created with other prominent nationalists the United Gold Coast Convention, a new party campaigning for independence. Kwame Nkrumah was recalled from England to serve as the new party's Secretary. In 1948, in connection with the Accra riots, the 'big six' – including Danquah, Nkrumah and other four founders of the UGCC were arrested by the colonial regime and

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<sup>19</sup> The classic study on Akyem remains Addo-Fening, *Akyem Abuakwa*. For more details on Danquah's life, see the autobiographical essay that he wrote while he was detained by the British in 1948, Danquah, "Struggle."

<sup>20</sup> See Rathbone, *Murder and Politics*, chapters 1-3.

accused of subversion.<sup>21</sup> It is in 1949, following their release, that the ‘two traditions’ in Ghanaian politics became more visible, with Nkrumah establishing the CPP, and leading the country to independence. Danquah became a key figure in the opposition to Nkrumah; he was arrested for the first time in 1961 (and released in 1962), and again in 1964. He died in jail in 1965.

Given the centrality of Akan culture for Danquah’s political and intellectual project, the ways in which Twi language expresses notions of political and economic inequality represent an obvious starting point. However, there is no single expression in Twi that captures these concepts.<sup>22</sup> Typically, the discourse about political and economic inequality revolves around two articulations. The first, and more common, is *pepepeyeɔ nnim*; literally the negation or opposite of *pepepeyeɔ*, which means ‘exactitude’ and, by extension, equality. The second word is *nyiyimu*, which primarily means ‘removal’ and, by extension, it is used to mean discrimination.<sup>23</sup> However, without additional qualification and turns of phrases that make explicit that the ‘lack of equality’ or the ‘removal/discrimination’ refer to the political or economic realm, this remains unclear, and usually economic inequality is expressed with reference to notions of poverty (*ohia*) and wealth (*sika*), and to the ‘moral economy’ underpinning the relationship between the rich (*asikafoɔ*) and the poor (*ahiafoɔ*).<sup>24</sup> Although there is no single expression that unambiguously captures its economic and political manifestations, inequality was not only a key feature of social life, but also a key ordering principle of the Akan metaphysical world, in which different entities were ranked by power.<sup>25</sup> In its emphasis on relative (rather than absolute) poverty, Akan thought shares deep similarities

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<sup>21</sup> These included Ebenezer Ako-Adjei, Edward Akufo-Addo, Emmanuel Obetsebi-Lampsey, and William Ofori Atta.

<sup>22</sup> In direct quotations from Twi texts, I have maintained the original orthography rather than standardising it.

<sup>23</sup> Thanks to David Damtar for clarifying this point.

<sup>24</sup> The expression comes from Thompson’s classic “Moral Economy of the Crowd”.

<sup>25</sup> Boni, *Le Strutture della Diseguaglianza*; Konadu, *Our Own Way*.

with other African languages and cultures.<sup>26</sup> *Umphawi*, the Chewa (language spoken primarily in Malawi) word for ‘poor’ ‘denotes lack of kin and friends’.<sup>27</sup> A Serer proverb (from what is today’s Senegal) asserts that ‘The true poor person is he who has no one’.<sup>28</sup> A Luganda proverb says: ‘A poor man is like a yam: he creeps alone’.<sup>29</sup> The Yoruba say: ‘A poor man has no relatives’.<sup>30</sup> In Akan proverbs we find the same message: *Ohiani nni yankoo* (the poor person has no friend).<sup>31</sup> In other instances, poverty is explicitly condemned (*Ohia ne gyimi*, poverty is stupidity).<sup>32</sup> This attitude towards the poor is complemented by the prominence of a rhetoric praising individual wealth accumulation, and the status that comes from it: *Osikani ne panin* (‘the rich person is an elder’, so bound to acquire society’s respect).<sup>33</sup> The emphasis is also on the profound distinctions separating social classes: *Osikani ba ne ohiani ba ense* (A rich person’s child and a poor person’s child are not alike).<sup>34</sup>

With particular focus on Asante, a string of historical works has documented the pervasiveness of economic inequality in the Akan world and the implications of the cult of wealth on sovereignty and political culture.<sup>35</sup> Looking at praise poems (*apaeε*), Kwame Arhin emphasised the prominence of what he called a patrimonial ideology and, in contrast with Danquah’ interpretation of Akan institutions as ‘democratic’, maintained that the history of Asante between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and colonial rule was one in which the economic and political rights of the commoners were being eroded and sacrificed on the altar of military expansion, state centralisation and cult of wealth.<sup>36</sup> On the basis of a wide range of case studies, spanning

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<sup>26</sup> The most sophisticated study on the conceptual and linguistic history of ‘poverty’ in Africa in the long run is Stephens, “Bereft, Selfish, and Hungry”.

<sup>27</sup> Iliffe, *The African Poor*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Monga “Principles of Economics,” 313.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Iliffe, *The African Poor*, 59.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>31</sup> Appiah, Appiah, and Agyeman-Duah, *Bu Me Be*, proverb no. 2684. On poverty in Akan proverbs see Agyekum, “Ethnosemantics and Proverbs”.

<sup>32</sup> Appiah, Appiah, and Agyeman-Duah, *Bu Me Be*, proverb No. 2635.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, proverb No. 5670.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, proverb No. 5663.

<sup>35</sup> Wilks, “The Golden Stool”; McCaskie, “Accumulation, Wealth and Belief.”

<sup>36</sup> Arhin, “The Asante Praise Poems”.



from the pledging of cocoa farms to witchcraft accusations, Gareth Austin concluded that in colonial Asante the prevailing moral economy was one that encouraged ‘capitalist values’ – albeit in a form that was compatible with the small scale and atomised structure of the cocoa industry.<sup>37</sup> While historians have emphasised the anti-egalitarian foundations of Akan societies at specific points in time, the philosopher Kwame Gyekye described Akan social thought as a form of ‘moderate communitarianism’:

Akan social thought attempts to establish a delicate balance between the concepts of communality and individuality. [...] In Akan social philosophy, then, individualism and communalism are not seen as exclusive and opposing concepts, as they are in capitalist and communist philosophies.<sup>38</sup>

This passage captures how Danquah incorporated Akan intellectual repertoires in discussions of wealth and poverty. Not because this system of values translated unambiguously onto the concrete historical experience of Akan societies (as shown by the historians cited above), but because it says something important about how Danquah chose to construct, represent and mobilise it. Firstly, Danquah appealed to Akan proverbs to elaborate an original combination between individualism and communitarianism that sits uncomfortably with his standard characterisation as a free-market individualist. Danquah’s writings also show the limits of the dichotomous distinction between a ‘liberal’ (who naturalises economic inequality and considers it a necessary evil for the achievement of prosperity) and a ‘republican’ (who treats economic inequality as a political problem, and thus sees it as an obstacle to the establishment of fairer and more democratic communities) understanding of economic inequality.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, Akan thought and proverbs provided Danquah with a rich discursive repertoire that, while preserving an overall coherence, could be attached to seemingly antithetic

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<sup>37</sup> Austin, “Moral Economy of Accumulation”.

<sup>38</sup> Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought*, 160-162.

<sup>39</sup> Thompson, *The Politics of Inequality*.

philosophical labels (such as ‘socialism’ and ‘liberalism’) depending on their context of mobilisation.

The emphasis on the communitarian and solidaristic aspect of Akan society led Danquah to be very selective in his use of proverbs on wealth and poverty. In *The Akan Doctrine of God*, the proverbs he selected to characterise the essence of Akan social thought privileged the imperatives of reciprocity over the praise of wealth and individual accumulation:

445. *Obiako di ‘wo a, etoa ne yam*

“If one alone eats the honey, it plagues his stomach” [...]

832. *Odefoo a oso ne boto, wokyi.*

“To leave your benefactor to bear the load is prohibited (tabooed)”.

1373. *Ohiani mpaw dabere.*

“The poor relation never lacks a bed”.

2420. *Onipa ye wo yiye a, mfa bone nye no.*

“To him who is good to you do no evil”.

2423. *Onipa nye abe na ne ho ahyia ne ho.*

“Man is not a palm nut that he should be self-centred”.

3560. *Woye obi yiye na wanye wo bi a, na obu wo aboa.*

“He treats like a beast who does not reciprocate your goodness”.<sup>40</sup>

Danquah was obviously very aware of the many proverbs condemning poverty and the poor. He even included references to them in *Nyankonsem: Fables of the Celestial*, a play that he wrote in Twi in 1941. The play revolves around God putting on sale his wisdom (‘Fables of the Celestial’) and failing to find a worthy purchaser. Kwaku Ananse the spider, a central character in Akan culture, was presented in the play as poor person willing to purchase the

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<sup>40</sup> Danquah, *Akan Doctrine of God*, Appendix I, 188-197. Danquah drew these proverbs from the collection compiled by the missionary Johann Gottlieb Christaller in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. Christaller, *Twi Mmeseusem*.

‘Fables of the Celestial’. His wife Aso expressed doubts on his capacity to do so by saying: ‘One cannot buy wisdom, but poverty comes from the lack of wisdom’.<sup>41</sup> In a later pamphlet, Danquah explained how to reconcile the communitarian ideal with the evidence of an unequal society that disregarded and despised the poor: ‘The poor [is] non-existent in Akan communities. [...] I refer to the poor as a class and not as individuals. I could give you a list of 61 proverbs that deal with poverty and the poor man, but I have not come across a single proverb in which the expression *ahiafoɔ* appears’.<sup>42</sup> Even though this is factually accurate – as the subject of most proverbs on poverty is *ohiani* (the single poor man/person), rather than *ahiafoɔ* (poor people as a whole), this has more to do with the ways in which Twi proverbs are typically formulated, rather than with the realities of Akan social life.

Danquah’s emphasis on the ‘classless’ and communitarian nature of precolonial African societies presented analogies with the ideas of African socialists like Nkrumah, and Julius Nyerere. As future President of Tanzania, the latter’s concept of *ujamaa* (or ‘familyhood’ in Swahili) articulated a vision for rural socialism allegedly built on precolonial values of communal ownership of factors of production and solidarity.<sup>43</sup> However, while reiterating (and agreeing with Nyerere on) the extraneity of concepts of ‘class’ in African societies, Danquah also heavily condemned Nyerere’s vision of socialism as one that was bound to perpetuate inequalities and conflicts over the appropriation of wealth, while at the same time undermining the incentives that individuals needed to thrive.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly socialism, either in its ‘African’ or ‘scientific’ version did not offer any solution for postcolonial development: ‘What the African needs in the utmost is not an atavistic backward move to lick the ancestral Ujamaa, nor

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<sup>41</sup> Danquah, *Nyankonsem*, 3. Thanks to David Dantar for translating this passage.

<sup>42</sup> Danquah, *Obligation in Akan Society*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Nyerere, “*Ujamaa*.”

<sup>44</sup> Danquah, “Letter to Julius Nyerere.”

is it a German-made thalidomide tranquillizer called socialism, which may produce disfigured, limbless and malformed societies for us in this pregnant generation'.<sup>45</sup>

While this claim seems to vindicate the conventional reading of Danquah as an individualist and anti-socialist, the labels he used to 'translate' the essential features of the Akan system into Western categories changed significantly over time. In 1928, he wrote that whether the Akyem Abuakwa political system was 'communistic or socialistic we cannot and we need not say now'.<sup>46</sup> Ten years later, in a lecture on the history of Akyem Abuakwa he claimed that 'Our communism is the most perfect, the most Christian, that ever man devised', combining communal ownership of land with complete individual freedom for any citizen who wanted to cultivate it: 'Land is free in Akim Abuakwa in a sense that no modernist can understand. Even in Russia where the most advanced type of communism appears to have been established, it is not so easy.'<sup>47</sup> In 1948, Danquah called 'socialism' the goal for a self-governing Gold Coast, but this time he defined it as 'government authorised by the people and governing in the name of the people for the people', rather than with reference to patterns of land ownership.<sup>48</sup> It is only in the 1950s and 1960s that Danquah's writings incorporated an openly anti-socialist and individualist lexicon, leading him to conclude that 'a close examination reveals that the African is, at heart, a liberal' (rather than a socialist, as Nkrumah and Nyerere claimed).<sup>49</sup>

This shift was also mirrored in Danquah's changing interpretation of the political and economic lessons of Christianity. While in 1948 he claimed that 'the form of Communism I regard as thoroughly suitable for humanity is the New Testament type', by 1959 he labelled individualism 'Christ's great message', and was concerned that Ghana was 'veering away from

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>46</sup> Danquah, *Gold Coast: Akan Laws*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Danquah, *An Objectified History*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Danquah, "The African Conference," 111.

<sup>49</sup> Danquah, "Letter to His Excellency, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1962" 175-176.

the liberalism of Christianity to the absolutism of Communism'.<sup>50</sup> In polemic with Reverend Trevor Bush, a South African missionary denouncing the complicity of missionaries in Africa's exploitation, Danquah warned of the dangers of conflating the Christian view of ownership and community with state-led socialism:

The whole question is whether Jesus did advocate that the principal means of production, *land, capital and labour*, should be brought to him and controlled by him or by any State in which he was interested. If members of the Christ community had 'all things in common' were these things dished out to them by a super-state, or did those things belong to all of them *in common*?<sup>51</sup>

Against the background of a consistent attempt to mobilise Akan and Christian discursive repertoires to theorise a harmonious social order, Danquah's deployment of the concept of 'liberalism' should be understood as a rhetorical tool to articulate his opposition to Nkrumah's policies and ideology, rather than an unchanging and essential feature of his political and economic thought.

### **3. Cocoa and economic inequality**

Cocoa was the pillar of Ghana's political economy under colonial rule, and a recurring theme in Danquah's writings. Between the 1890s and 1911 Ghana (or the Gold Coast, as it was called under colonial rule) became the world's biggest exporter of cocoa. Danquah's personal life was intimately connected with this transformation, as the cocoa farms responsible for this impressive take-off were located in his native Akyem Abuakwa.<sup>52</sup> However, the 'rural capitalists' behind the take-off were migrants (mostly from Akwapim) who had purchased land from the Akyem sub-chiefs.<sup>53</sup> In the late 1920s, Danquah saw the increasingly common

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<sup>50</sup> Danquah, "Struggle," 63; Danquah, "Individualism – Christ's Great Message."

<sup>51</sup> Danquah, "Letter to Rev. Bush," 290.

<sup>52</sup> After a few decades, most of cocoa output would come from Asante. On the differences in cocoa farming between Akyem and Asante, see Austin, *Land, Labour and Capital*, chapters 14 and 17.

<sup>53</sup> The classic study on this, in which migrant cocoa farmers were conceptualised as 'rural capitalists' is Hill, *Migrant Cocoa-Farmers*.

practice of land sales to migrant cocoa farmers as an attack on the ‘traditional’ system of land tenure, by which ‘All land belongs to the community’ (through the Paramount Stool), ‘Any person born of Akim Abuakwa parents being a member of Akim Abuakwa clan has the inalienable right to cultivate a Stool land unsold or uncultivated or unreserved’, and the Stool could not sell or lease uncultivated or unreserved land ‘except it be for the paramount interests of the community or nation’.<sup>54</sup> Frequent land sales to migrant farmers for cocoa cultivation undermined the distinctive combination of communitarianism and individual freedom which characterised land tenure in Akyem Abuakwa:

the short-sighted and reckless manner in which lands are disposed of to-day, as if they were so many pieces of common cowries to be had for the asking, cannot pretend to have any historical evidence in support of the practice. In those ancient days land was held in very high respect and esteem, and this for the simple reason that tribal or stool lands were judged to be as sacred as the stool itself. [...] it seems safe to say that the conception of land ownership was part of the general religious scheme [...] An absolute sale of land by an Akan was therefore not simply a question of alienating realty; notoriously, it was a case of selling a spiritual heritage for a mess of pottage, a veritable betrayal of ancestral trust, an undoing of the hope of posterity.<sup>55</sup>

This passage captures several important aspects of Danquah’s thought in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Land sales embodied simultaneously a logic of differentiation and separation (between the land and the community) and equalisation (through which land was inscribed in a more general logic of ‘value’ that could be quantified and monetised). These processes carried two main implications. Firstly, they suspended the overlap between the meaningful political and economic communities and, by introducing the potential ‘universalism’ of money exchange, threatened the communal nature of land tenure, and its constitutive role in the construction and preservation of an Akyem identity.<sup>56</sup> Secondly, and more importantly,

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<sup>54</sup> Danquah, *Cases in Akan Law*, xxx-xxxii.

<sup>55</sup> Danquah, *Gold Coast: Akan Laws*, 212.

<sup>56</sup> On land policies, and their impact on notions of citizenship in Akyem Abuakwa, see respectively Ofosu-Mensah, “Politics of Property Rights”, and Rathbone “Defining Akyemfo”.

Danquah suggested that these sales transformed land into just another factor of production. In other words, land sales erased the ontological and metaphysical specificities that set land apart from labour, capital, and other means of producing wealth.<sup>57</sup> What was at stake, then, was not simply ‘economic inequality’ in the sense of changing property rights and the dynamics underpinning the distribution of factors of production among groups of people. Instead, in this passage Danquah was critiquing the expansion of an ‘economic’ sphere and logic that, through an operation of discursive and semantic violence, subverted the ontological ‘inequalities’ that legitimised Akan economic and political communitarianism. Furthermore, land sales shortened and disrupted the inter-generational horizon of Akan thought, sacrificing the integrity and perceived needs of the future community.<sup>58</sup> If in the 1960s Polly Hill noted that ‘there have been few to realize the significance of his [Danquah’s] protests about land sales’, in recent years these claims have been used in the Ghanaian press as evidence of Danquah’s ethnocentrism and unfitness to be a truly national leader.<sup>59</sup> For our purpose, it is more productive to treat Danquah’s stance on land sales and cocoa farmers as part of the larger story of how, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, ‘land’ (*asase*) and ‘nation’ (*ɔman*) became increasingly overlapping, and then practically synonymous, in Ghanaian nationalism.<sup>60</sup>

From this point of view, the cocoa farmers hold up in 1937-38 represented a crucial node in the evolution of Danquah’s stance. The cocoa farmers organised a hold-up in which they refused to sell cocoa to trading firms, while also boycotting the import and purchase of European goods.<sup>61</sup> By then Danquah had become a member of the advisory board to the Gold Coast and Ashanti Farmers Union. In the 1930s and 1940s, he no longer depicted cocoa farmers

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<sup>57</sup> This distinction disappeared in later writings.

<sup>58</sup> On the inter-generational aspects of Akan economic thought (but with reference to the Nzema), see Pavanello, “Work of the Ancestors”.

<sup>59</sup> Hill, *Migrant Cocoa Farmers*, 22; Kwarteng, “J.B. Danquah”.

<sup>60</sup> Boele van Hensbroek, “Conceptualising ‘Land’ and ‘Nation’.”

<sup>61</sup> See Alence, “Gold Coast Cocoa Crisis”. This was part of a longer history of cocoa hold ups, but certainly the most disruptive up to that point.

as complicit in ‘how rapidly mother Abuakwa is being dismembered’ through land sales.<sup>62</sup> *Liberty of the Subject*, the pamphlet in which Danquah reconstructed the history of the farmers’ movement and analysed the political and economic implications of the hold-up, reiterated his commitment to a communitarian ideal, but with a geographical scope that was no longer limited to Akyem Abuakwa and embraced the Gold Coast as a whole. After citing approvingly Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* on the necessity of subordinating individual freedoms to a broader public good, Danquah concluded that ‘Individual liberty is a chimera’, and man ‘a brutish beast without the accretions of the social whole, the only true reality, the highest good of man’.<sup>63</sup> Once again, this points at the necessity to heavily qualify interpretations of Danquah’s ‘individualism’. *Liberty of the Subject* also marked a key change in how Danquah thought about cocoa farming, economic inequality and the political economy of colonialism. The importance of land as “the hub upon which the lifeblood of the nation turns” and as the locus of “ultimate sovereignty” was reaffirmed, but the 1937-38 cocoa hold-up was inscribed within a larger struggle:

the present struggle for the control of the cocoa trade and output is one specifically about capital and labour, the owner of the machine and the owner of the soil, the masters of the Exchanges and Bourses who deal in produce they may never see or touch and the peasant tillers of the land who depend upon physical contact with the soil to exchange their blood or the sweat of their labour to gain fat in the earth.<sup>64</sup>

The scale of the struggle was, according to Danquah, truly global, and bypassed racial distinctions:

The present controversy is something more than one between white man and black man. [...] Some of these manufacturers and capitalists are not doing these things to us only because we are black, but mostly because we are defenceless [...]. They have done it without scruple in

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Hill, *Migrant Cocoa-Farmers*, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Danquah, *Liberty of the Subject*, 54. Danquah cited Hitler saying that “The right to personal freedom comes second to the duty of maintaining the race”, and added “the duty of allowing the general will to prevail”, *Ibid.*, 52. The surprising and counterintuitive history of Nazi Germany as a discursive repertoire for African anti-colonialism in the interwar period remains to be written, but some of these entanglements have been explored in the context of Nkrumah’s Ghana, Allman, “Phantoms of the Archive”.

<sup>64</sup> Danquah, *Liberty of the Subject*, 58.



Fascist countries and in the so-called democracies. They have done it to their own people, kith and kin [...].<sup>65</sup>

Behind the mobilisation was not simply the low price paid to the farmers by the trading companies, but rather a broader commitment to overthrow the ‘principle of exploitation, the turning of a free peasant community of independent producers into a “commodity” of the labour market, mere instruments in the hands of international capitalists’.<sup>66</sup> The cocoa hold-up contributed to the debates which led, in 1947, to the creation of the Cocoa Marketing Board, acting as a state monopsony in charge for buying all the produce of Gold Coast cocoa farmers. While in theory the Cocoa Marketing Board aimed to stabilise farmers’ incomes against the price fluctuations of international markets, in practice it became a form of taxation, as the gap between the price paid to the farmers and the one prevailing in international markets was appropriated by the colonial state, and usually invested for the development of non-cocoa producing areas. In 1951, before leading the country to independence in 1957, Nkrumah became Leader of the Government Business. Nkrumah’s government used the new colonial machinery to transfer resources from Asante (which, by the 1950s, was the main cocoa producing area and the core of political opposition to Nkrumah) to other areas. On the other hand, the opposition, and Danquah, favoured political and economic decentralisation, and the preservation of the power of the Stools to manage land on behalf of the community.<sup>67</sup>

Accordingly, the focus of Danquah’s writings on inequality shifted to the effects of Nkrumah’s policies. The struggle was no longer between labour and global capitalists, but between Nkrumah’s government and the farmers’ ‘free enterprise’. In 1954, for example, Danquah criticised the Stabilisation Fund, ‘not created out of taxes or export duties’, but rather ‘part of the farmers’ own money kept for them’ by the Cocoa Marketing Board.<sup>68</sup> Not only

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>67</sup> See Allman, *Quills of the Porcupine*.

<sup>68</sup> Danquah, “The Poor Cocoa Farmer,” 71.

were the farmers subjected to different rules, and deprived of much needed income at a time in which they were already overwhelmed by debt, but their income was being spent elsewhere. Furthermore, the government was also undermining their potential for free enterprise by making them increasingly dependent on an elaborate system of government-sponsored loans, rather than simply let them keep a higher percentage of their income in the first place.<sup>69</sup> The inequalities exacerbated by the government's policies threatened to undermine the country's march towards political independence and prosperity:

The distribution of the power called wealth, expressed in the ability to educate one's children [...], ability to improve one's living conditions [...], ability to command a greater variety of food and goods [...] and, above all, the ability to command health and leisure and to enjoy the goodness, the arts and beauties of life – the distribution of this ability among the people who now possess it, and who guard it jealously, and the many who are at present wholly and totally deprived of it, may cause a revolution in the standard of living of the general mass of the people. Indeed, the Gold Coast revolution will not have worked itself to completion without the political being succeeded by the economic and social revolution.<sup>70</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, the notion of 'free enterprise' recurred in Danquah's writings as something that was both grounded in Akan culture, and constantly threatened by Nkrumah's government. However, what he meant by this should be qualified. Danquah considered countries like Italy, Japan and Germany prime examples of 'liberal economic policy' and development models led by 'free enterprise'.<sup>71</sup> This suggests that he was not advocating unbridled capitalism and free markets – an anachronism introduced by later commentators- but rather that, as long as limits were placed on the state's coercive capacity, his vision was potentially compatible with a strong 'developmental state'.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>71</sup> Danquah, "Petition," 121; Danquah, "Letter to Harry Nimbus."

#### 4. Land tenure, banking and political imagination

Land tenure was simultaneously a lynchpin of Danquah's defence of the Akan economic and political system, and an important building block in Eurocentric evolutionary narratives, seeing communal land tenure, and then feudalism, as the preconditions for the emergence of property rights and 'modern' private property. Danquah opposed the view – shared with different intents by colonial anthropologists and Kwame Nkrumah - of Asante and Akan states as 'feudal'. The construction of 'Africa' as an homogenous and self-contained conceptual category in Western imagination depended crucially on temporal narratives.<sup>72</sup> The anthropologist Johannes Fabian noted that anthropology has tended to construct its object through what he labelled the 'denial of coevalness', by which he meant 'a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of ethnographic discourse'.<sup>73</sup> In colonial Ghana, anthropological research was almost synonymous with Captain Richard Sutherland Rattray (1881-1938), who was in charge of the Gold Coast Special Commissioner for Anthropology, and documented extensively Akan culture and institutions in Asante. In *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, Rattray claimed that

After the fight at Feyiase [1701], the making of the Golden Stool, and the acknowledgment of the Territorial Division of Kumasi as the head of a kind of Confederacy, we enter upon a phase where the parallel to feudalism, as known in Europe, appears to me very striking. [...] A silent and unnoticed revolution took place with regard to land tenure which was in conformity with the main characteristic of feudalism. A kind of multiple proprietorship arose. The King became the superior owner of all land, i.e. soil, in the kingdom, but this claim coexisted with many grades of inferior ownership right down to a descending scale until the inferior property of the family land-holder was reached.<sup>74</sup>

Representations of Asante as 'feudal' were also deployed by Kwame Nkrumah to stress, in contrast with Danquah's emphasis on the democratic essence of indigenous institutions, their

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<sup>72</sup> Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*.

<sup>73</sup> Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 31.

<sup>74</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 76.

‘backward’ and autocratic nature: ‘the unhappy history of Ashanti, and the mystery regarding the Golden Stool, its symbol of feudal power, has made the acceptance of democracy in that part of the country more difficult than elsewhere’.<sup>75</sup> In a letter to the Accra based *Daily Graphic*, Danquah reiterated that ‘the greatest and most glorious of our Ghana inheritance is that the lands are held by the people in free ownership and not in feud to their Chiefs or Stools’.<sup>76</sup> Moreover (and without mentioning that Rattray had already described Asante land tenure as feudal), Danquah claimed that Nkrumah’s talk of Ghana emerging from ‘tribalism and feudalism’ painted their country in a more derogative manner than representations by ‘the imperialists who had lived under feudalism and had grown ashamed of it in their own countries and had got rid of it centuries ago’.<sup>77</sup>

Discussions of land tenure had far-reaching implications for a wide range of issues, including the identification and setting up of the most appropriate institutions for the country’s economic development. The debate, championed by Danquah, on the possibility to establish a national bank in the late 1940s is a case in point. African debates on the creation of banks with some degrees of autonomy from the colonial metropolises remain an understudied chapter in the history of nationalism and political imagination in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is unfortunate, as African demands for a bank that could provide credit to farmers, traders and merchants at the same conditions of European customers emerged in response to different forms of economic and social inequality. Just before the Gold Coast Commercial Bank was created, in 1952, the sector was a *de facto* duopoly controlled by the Bank of British West Africa and Barclays which had, in the Gold Coast, 11 and 7 branches respectively.<sup>78</sup> While in the interwar years Nigeria

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<sup>75</sup> Nkrumah, *Ghana*, 220.

<sup>76</sup> Danquah, “The People of Ghana,” 139.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139. See also Danquah, *Gold Coast: Akan Laws*, 5: ‘his [Rattray’s] remarks on Akan land tenure, whereby he attempts to draw a comparison of resemblance between the English (Anglo-Saxon) feudal tenure and the Akan system of land control and ownership, seem to betray an incomplete grasp of the real nature of our non-religious institutions’.

<sup>78</sup> Gold Coast, *Report*, paragraph 34. On the early history of the bank, see the celebratory Ghana Commercial Bank, *Ghana Commercial Bank*.

saw – often thanks to Ghanaian entrepreneurs like William Tete Ansah – the proliferation of an ‘indigenous bank movement’, in the Gold Coast this was prevented by the 1906 Companies Ordinance.<sup>79</sup> The Colonial Office’s and the Bank of England’s opposition to these requests was grounded in a racist view of Africans as ‘uncreditworthy’, and found additional justification in the agricultural and small scale nature of much African-owned economic activity. From the point of view of African intellectuals, merchants and entrepreneurs, requesting a national bank amounted to expose and question the injustice underpinning colonial political economy.

Early Ghanaian proponents of a national bank implicitly accepted the periodization of the ‘colonial library’: all specific institutions could do was to allow ‘catching up’. For example, the merchant Samuel Duncan, who as early as in 1916 led a delegation of indigenous merchants to London to protest against the monopoly of the Bank of British West Africa, wrote that

Wealth is a potential factor governing all departments of life among the civilized nations of the earth today and the powers that be. If therefore, we wish our claims for political freedom to command attention, our educational progress and attainments may serve us to some extent, but the surest road for us to achieve success in this direction is the accumulation of wealth.<sup>80</sup>

Danquah went a step further, ironically debunked the stadial vision of history underpinning colonial development discourse, and remarked the sense of open-endedness through which alternative futures could be imagined:

I do not quite know what is meant by ‘the present stage of economic development’, whether it be an Elizabethan stage or a Bernard Shaw stage, whether it be a Conservative, die-hard stage, or a Socialist, nationalisation stage. But the time has come for us to cut straight through the vicious circle, and there can be no doubt that time is now.<sup>81</sup>

The refusal to establish national banks that could provide Africans with credit for investment was also grounded in narratives about temporality. Representing another variant

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<sup>79</sup> Uche, “Credit for Africans,” 79.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>81</sup> Danquah, “National Bank,” 99.

of the ‘denial of coevalness’ described by Fabian, colonial narratives did not always confine Africans to a frozen ‘past’ time, but rather set up different types of temporal mismatches. Accordingly, Danquah claimed that the colonial government’s position was that it was either too early to establish a national bank (because of lack of political and economic maturity), too late (because allegedly the existing British banks already did all that had to be done), or simply pointless, because the peculiar nature of local institutions – this time implicitly depicted as incapable of reform – made it impossible for a commercial bank to succeed in the first place.<sup>82</sup> The latter point was made, once again, with reference to the institution of communal land tenure, seen as standing either outside or at an early stage of the teleological narrative that inevitably culminates with private property, capitalism and prosperity. In response, Danquah performed an operation of temporal delinking:

And so to the argument that because most of our lands are held on a communal tenure, a national bank is out of the question, I believe the best answer is that capitalist form of security is not the only pebble on the beach. In a country where lands are held on the communal system, your best brains must devise ways and means of making the system creditworthy, or your best brains are not giving you their best.<sup>83</sup>

This passage is revealing for two reasons. Firstly, in a manner mirroring his uses of the word ‘socialism’, Danquah’s use of the word ‘capitalism’ confirms that he mobilised these categories in a more fluid manner than both existing scholarship and contemporary Ghanaian political discourse would allow. Secondly, the passage underlines the central and ambivalent place of land tenure in Danquah’s thought. On the one hand, communal land tenure acted as a constraint, and hinted at a vision of the precolonial past as the primary repository of ‘authentic’ solutions tailored to (and naturally arising from) local specificities. On the other hand,

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 99.

communal land tenure underpinned Danquah's invitation to deliberately imagine and construct a novel institutional ecology.

However, Danquah's engagement with the past took a variety of forms, which led him to connect – by means of analogy or genealogy – Akan history with a rich and diverse set of referents. These acts of inscription simultaneously aimed at 'elevating' the history of the Akan people within Eurocentric chronologies and civilisational hierarchies, but also subvert them by partly delinking it from their teleological and evolutionary underpinnings. The very choice of Ghana's name for postcolonial Gold Coast is credited to Danquah, one of the earliest proponents of the hypothesis that the Akan inhabited the ancient Ghana Empire (centred in today's Mauritania) until the empire's decline.<sup>84</sup> In explaining the centuries of 'silence' and absence in the archaeological record between the fall of the Ghana Empire and early traces of Akan culture in what is today's Ghana, Danquah resorted to an unusual analogy with the Anglo-Saxons, unable 'to piece together the events and periods that led them to find themselves in England' following their migration from Scandinavia.<sup>85</sup> According to Danquah, the lack of archaeological evidence from the centuries of migration and resettlement was, both in the case of the Anglo-Saxons and the Akan, a deliberate choice by populations who, in light of their suffering, wanted to forget their painful past.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, Danquah maintained that, before becoming part of the Ghana Empire, the roots of the Akan people had to be found in Sumeria.<sup>87</sup> The anthropologist Jack Goody, who in the 1960s dismissed these claims as 'crackpot anthropology', emphasised their political sub-text:

The association with the old kingdom of Ghana meant a connexion with an established civilisation, which at the time of its zenith was in many ways the equal of the contemporary

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<sup>84</sup> Danquah, "Origins," 109.

<sup>85</sup> Danquah, *An Objectified History*, 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Danquah, "Lecture on the Culture," 295. On the history and legacies of these debates see McCaskie, "Asante Origins".

kingdoms of Western Europe. And behind the link with Ghana was a shadowy association with the ancient Middle East, the very source of the urban civilisation of the west.<sup>88</sup>

Even without evidence of direct contact, the classical world provided another point of comparison: ‘with the single exception of ancient Greece [...], I do not know of a wider democratic representative franchise than the one we have in Akim Abuakwa’.<sup>89</sup> In a lecture, Danquah did not exclude, on the basis of a few linguistic similarities, the possibility of an ancient Akan contact with China.<sup>90</sup> These examples show that, far from being confined to land tenure and to the quest for the appropriate institutional framework for Ghana’s development, Danquah’s engagement with the past aimed to enable the Akan ‘to see themselves clearly in relation to mankind in general’.<sup>91</sup>

## 5. Conclusion: Danquah in global intellectual history

This article has used economic inequality as an entry point to present a more nuanced portrait of Danquah’s intellectual evolution. Yet, when compared with Nkrumah’s, Danquah’s political and economic thought seems less amenable to inscription within global intellectual historiography. If, following the useful distinction introduced by Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, we take ‘global’ to mean (among other meanings) ‘a subjective category used by historical agents who are themselves the objects of the historian’s enquiry’, there is little scope for such an inclusion.<sup>92</sup> Although in a few instances Danquah declared a ‘World Government’ with ‘one sovereign World parliament and one World court’ to be an effective solution against the threat of nuclear destruction, the ‘global’ underpinnings of political and economic processes were not interrogated in any systematic manner.<sup>93</sup> The key exceptions remain his 1930s and

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<sup>88</sup> Goody, “Myth of a State,” 473.

<sup>89</sup> Danquah, *An Objectified History*, 23.

<sup>90</sup> Danquah, “Lecture on the Culture,” 304.

<sup>91</sup> This expression was used by C. W. Welman, the Secretary for Native Affairs who penned the foreword to Reverend T.W. Balmer’s *A History of the Akan Peoples of the Gold Coast*, one of the earliest texts to advance the hypothesis of the Egyptian origins of the Akan, quoted in Goody, “Myth of a State,” 464.

<sup>92</sup> Moyn and Sartori, “Approaches,” 5.

<sup>93</sup> Danquah, “Letter to His Excellency, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1962,” 138.



1940s observations on the place of cocoa farmers in the global economy. From this point of view, Danquah is equidistant, and very far, from both the liberal and neoliberal ‘globalists’ and the black ‘world-makers’ that populate some influential intellectual histories.<sup>94</sup> Nor was there any explicit consideration of the Diaspora, which historically has constituted a privileged site for African intellectuals to articulate the ‘global’ as a category of analysis and reflection.<sup>95</sup>

Even an author sympathetic to Danquah noted that

the entire panoply of the Nkrumah legacy is also the story of the proverbial Diasporic African experience; for unlike the more patrician and aristocratic Dr. Danquah, the future Prime Minister Nkrumah immersed himself in the affairs of Black America in a way that his former teacher never had the opportunity to do or experience’.<sup>96</sup>

At first sight, Danquah’s uneven and punctuated gaze, going back and forth between the specificities of the Akan world and the British empire, might seem to vindicate Frederick Cooper’s scepticism towards the ‘global’ as a productive category for intellectual history.<sup>97</sup> Danquah’s work stimulates reflection on how indigenous languages and cultures shaped the formation of African anticolonial and postcolonial imaginaries. It documents the multiple ways in which the imagination of postcolonial alternative futures, an important element in recent historiography, depended crucially on the interrogation and reappropriation of precolonial values.<sup>98</sup>

On the other hand, Danquah’s reflections on economic inequality can be fruitfully used to interrogate other threads in global intellectual history. Taking the global as ‘a meta analytic category of the historian’ to characterise the global circulation of specific ideologies, Danquah’s intellectual trajectory complicates our understanding of how categories like

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<sup>94</sup> Slobodian, *Globalists*; Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*.

<sup>95</sup> See Diouf and Prais, “Casting the Badge”.

<sup>96</sup> Okoampa-Ahoofe, Jr. *Dr. J.B. Danquah*, 8.

<sup>97</sup> On Danquah’s view of economic inequality within the British Empire, see Danquah, *Friendship and Empire*, 13-16. Cooper, “How Global Do We Want”.

<sup>98</sup> For example, see Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

‘socialism’ and ‘liberalism’, were appropriated, negotiated and mobilised in anticolonial and postcolonial thought.<sup>99</sup> From this point of view, Danquah’s trajectory is an invitation to contemplate the contingent nature of their acquisition, and their mutable inscription within an otherwise remarkably consistent attempt to articulate a meaningful relationship between individuals and community. Finally, if the global refers to ‘a substantive scale of historical process’, Danquah’s engagements with the past hinted at an Akan-centred, non-Eurocentric global history.<sup>100</sup> Although the cultural diffusionism underpinning his writings has been discarded as factually inaccurate and methodologically naïve, his work on the origins of the Akan and the analogies with other parts of the world provides a striking example of how intellectuals in the global South challenged Western evolutionary narratives, and experimented with different historical frames to create deeper meanings for their political endeavours.

Yet, despite its capacity to bring together disparate discursive threads and to enrich debates on what constitutes ‘development’ in specific times and places, the intellectual history of economic inequality in colonial and postcolonial Africa remains largely unwritten.<sup>101</sup> Shifting the focus of economic inequality beyond the quantitative study of wealth and income distributions can offer new perspectives on political imagination in the Global South. Retrieving economic inequality’s multiple referents in African discourses can make visible previously unnoticed intellectual constellations, and illuminate their role in constructing the ‘global’, weaving ‘regimes of historicity’, and imagining different forms of collective belonging.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Moyn and Sartori, “Approaches,” 5.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> This approach can complement works such as Decker and McMahon, *The Idea of Development*.

<sup>102</sup> Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*.

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