Kwame Nkrumah's construction of 'the African people' via the Unite or Perish myth: A discourse-historical analysis of populist performance

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Abstract

Employing Wodak's discourse-historical approach, this paper examines how Ghana's independence leader – Kwame Nkrumah – in his creation of the Unite or Perish myth constructed 'the African people' in a manner in sync with populist performance. It argues that Nkrumah's discourse, in its focus on the formation of a Union Government of Africa as the only means of Africa's peace, progress, security and survival in the post-independence era, can be characterized as a form of populist rhetoric that presupposes an antagonistic relationship between two homogeneous social groups. To this end, the paper analyzes three discursive strategies utilized by Nkrumah in promoting anti-establishment sentiments while celebrating or valorizing 'the ordinary people': nomination and predication of social actors and actions, the construction of a man of the people image and the exploitation of familiarity and historical memory. It concludes with a discussion on the implications of the study for political discourse analysis in terms of the interrelationship between political myth and populist performance.

1. Introduction

The development and function of mythic themes in politics and the media continue to receive attention from (critical) discourse analysts. Myth can be defined as a simplifying process with an ideological motivation owing to the selection it makes in the messages it accentuates and attenuates (Barthes, 1993). It favors a certain representation and understanding of events in the world and promotes this as the only perspective, thereby denying other representations and interpretations. Unlike the popular and pejorative denotation of myth (i.e. falsehood, distortion or delusion), the scholarly usage of myth indicates that myths have unquestioned validity (and therefore not needing justification) within the belief or value systems of the social groups which cherish them (Flood, 2002). A political myth is described by Flood (1996: 44) as "an ideologically marked narrative which purports to give a true account of a set of past, present or predicted political events and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group". It is an unverifiable, explanatory thesis that purports a causal theory of political events and enjoys wide public support (Geis, 1987). The burgeoning literature on political myth-making has demonstrated how political myth serves the purpose of dis/qualifying certain political developments, inspiring a certain course of behavior, building consensus for sociopolitical ideas and constructing one social group as a threat to the identity and continued existence of another social group (cf. Geis, 1987; Gastil, 1992; Flood,

2002). This scholarship has also illustrated the role of language in re/constructing the past, present and future, shaping society and promoting a worldview that aligns with sociopolitical objectives. Further, the manipulation of history for political gain (e.g. Kelsey, 2013), the significance of narratives of the nation (e.g. Bishop & Jaworski, 2003) and how sociopolitical actors use language in identity-construction, argumentation and social relations negotiation (e.g. Nartey, 2019) have been discussed in the literature on political myth-making.

These studies notwithstanding, there is very little work on the analysis of myth as it pertains to African political myth creation and African politicians. However, such studies are relevant since they can provide newer insight into the nature of political myths, by for instance, showing new ways of utilizing political mythic themes. In this regard, this paper illustrates how political mythic themes can serve the purpose of resistance, nationalism, populism and (national) identity politics; these being functions that have not been emphasized in the literature except for Kelsey (2016) whom briefly touched on populism but did so less directly and, nonetheless, investigated the discourse of journalism (i.e. news stories about politicians) rather than political discourse or presidential rhetoric proper. It can also be observed from the existing literature that previous studies on political mythology have hardly examined the discourses on colonialism and imperialism, albeit such discourses can be regarded as potential 'sites' for the realization of various mythic themes (cf. Nartey, 2020a). In this vein, this study sheds light on how unique or important sociopolitical situations (here, colonialism) can shape the use of language in specific local contexts and give politicians an argumentative advantage in promoting a worldview that aligns with their sociopolitical goals. Hence, this study does not only contribute to an understanding of political myth-making in a context underexplored in the literature, but also holds implications for Africa's current/future political systems and illustrates the important role of language/discourse in political decolonization processes. As world politics stands today, 'pedulating' between globalization, isolationism and populism, such insights are crucial, especially in how African leaders can tackle the complex issue of neocolonialism and foreign domination through their actions, policies and programs. To fill the aforementioned gaps in the literature, this study analyzes the discourse of Kwame Nkrumah, a pioneering Pan-Africanist and Ghana's independence leader, as a form of political myth-making in sync with populist performance.

2. Context

Nkrumah had gone from prisoner to Prime Minister of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1952 and led Ghana to independence in 1957, making Ghana the first Sub-Saharan African country to gain independence. He was, however, ousted in 1966 by a coup and spent his last years in Guinea. Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist aspirations were developed against the backdrop of colonialism in Africa which led to his propagation for a 'United States of Africa' in the post-independence period as a means of protecting the continent from neocolonialism and bringing about socioeconomic transformation. Although this idea was not realized, it prepared the ground for an Organization of African Unity founded in 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which later became the African Union in 2001. In his opening address at the inauguration of the Organization of African Unity, Nkrumah put forward the idea of a political unification of all African states akin to the US and former USSR and vigorously promoted this view throughout his professional career as a politician. He made this declaration at the beginning of his speech: "Our objective is African Union now. There is no time to waste. We must unite now or perish … We shall lay here the foundations for a Continental Union of African States". I refer to this proclamation and Nkrumah's subsequent promotion of this view as a popular narrative in his speeches as the Unite or Perish myth (cf. Nartey, 2019).

Thus, the Unite or Perish myth is defined as the idea that a Union Government of Africa is the only way to guarantee Africa's continued existence, peace and security as well as the continent's economic reconstruction in the post-independence period. Importantly, Nkrumah constructs himself as the would-be leader of this unified nation. Hence, this paper argues that Nkrumah's promotion of the Unite or Perish myth operates as a form of populist performance in that it constructs the African people as a homogeneous group and the African continent as the 'homeland' or a nation state in antagonistic relations with another homogeneous social group (the colonialists/neocolonialists) (Taggart, 2000; Laclau, 2005). Going by Laclau's (2005) logics of equivalence and difference, it can be said that Nkrumah foregrounds the equivalential logic while attenuating the differential logic in his promotion of the African unity idea as the *volonté générale* (general will) of the African people (Hawkins, 2009), thereby valorizing the common people and promoting anti-system sentiments (Taggart, 2000).

This paper considers populism as a discursive frame (a construct that allows one to convey a certain social reality or provide meaning to events – Aslanidis, 2016) or as performance (how

political performance and action are used to create political relations and express political ideas and subjectivities – Moffitt & Tormey, 2014)[1]. Therefore, it is not viewed in the negative sense in which it is of often used today. In examining Nkrumah's exploitation of the Unite or Perish myth, this paper argues for an isomorphic relationship between political myth and populism; a positioned that has not been underscored in the literature. This is because myth can help politicians exploit the notion of 'the people' conceptualized as a homogeneous group and a 'homeland' that is opposed to 'the system' and make them (claim to) represent the 'general will' of the 'ordinary people' against an undesirable status quo. Given this argued interrelationship between political myth and populism, this paper holds that the theory of myth in politics must include populist notions. Admittedly, Nkrumah's conceptualization of Africa as a unified (political) entity in the 1950s and 1960s may not be the same as non-Africans anytime between the 1950s and the 21st Century who view Africa as an undifferentiated mass. However, this paper contends that the way he championed the idea of Pan-African unity and the establishment of an African nation state reflects elements of a populist style, including appeal to the people, perception of crisis, breakdown or threat and political incorrectness. This populist performance can be seen in his argumentation, discursive positioning as well as selection of rhetorical devices, and is the focus of this paper.

3. The discourse-historical approach

The historical contextualization of a linguistic phenomenon is the main assumption on which the discourse-historical approach (DHA) rests. Consequently, the notion of context is important in this framework and discourse is conceptualized as a set of context-dependent textual practices (Wodak, 2001). Reisigl and Wodak (2016) identify three dimensions relevant to context: intertextuality, interdiscursivity and field of action – intertextuality and interdiscursivity are particularly important to the current study. Within the DHA, three levels of analysis can be found: determining "the specific *content or topic(s)* of a specific discourse", examining "*discursive strategies*" and investigating "*linguistic means* (as types) and context-dependent *linguistic realizations* (as tokens)" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016: 32, emphasis in original). The identification of discursive strategies is a significant feature of the DHA. These strategies are a set of practices, including discursive practices, utilized by social actors in order to accomplish their aims. They are systematic ways of using language (even when used unintentionally) that reveal the intents of language users.

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[1] For a further discussion on populism, see Moffitt (2016, 2020).

The main discursive strategies include nomination (the linguistic identity of persons, objects, phenomena and actions), predication (the qualities, attributes and characteristics assigned to social actors), argumentation (the argumentative schemes through which positive and negative attributions are justified and legitimized), perspectivization (the perspectives from which argumentations, nominations and attributions are communicated) and intensification/mitigation (i.e. of the ideas or judgements expressed) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). These strategies can be linguistically realized in various ways, including the use of argumentative devices, membership categorization devices, stereotypical and evaluative attributions, rhetorical figures, modality, evocations and deictics. These strategies and lexico-syntactic resources are employed throughout the analysis. Of significance to the argumentation strategy is the concept of *topos*, referring to argumentative schemes used to establish the credibility, validity and persuasive force of claims that are made and realizable in discourse through conditional or causal paraphrases. Thus, *topoi* can be defined as aspects of argumentation that belong to the obligatory, either explicit or deducible, premises (Wodak & Boukala, 2015). They justify the transition from the argument(s) to the conclusion and "should be understood as quasi 'elliptic' argument where the premise is followed by the conclusion without giving any explicit evidence, while taking the conclusion to confirm, and relate to, the presupposed [accepted knowledge]" (Wodak & Boukala, 2015: 94). The relevant *topoi* used in this study include *topos* of contrast, comparison, (external) threat, history and history as teacher. The *topos* of contrast emphasizes inward sameness and the strongest differences to others whereas the *topos* of comparison suggests that the idea of difference and similarity can be used to de/legitimize actions and viewpoints. The *topos* of threat implies that if there are specific dangers or threats, one should do something against them while the *topos* of history (as teacher) suggests that history sheds light upon reality and lessons from the past offer guidance to human existence (Wodak, 2001).

The DHA is chosen because it allows the analysis to be informed by historical context, background information, extra-linguistic social variables and situational frames in order to comprehend Nkrumah's populist performance. The study considers populist performance as a social process (rather than an exclusive linguistic process) in which language plays an important (but not the only) role and embodies elements such as personal representations, historical experiences, social insights and linguistic actions. Hence, the DHA provides an appropriate

framework within which how Nkrumah's formulation of the Unite or Perish myth displays the typical features of a populist agenda can be analyzed.

4. Data

The data for this study comprises fifteen speeches given by Nkrumah in which he directly or indirectly promoted the idea of an African nation state as the only means of achieving Africa's economic transformation and social reconstruction in the post-independence era. The speeches were delivered at the height of Africa's independence struggle (i.e. late 1950s and early 1960s) and they discussed how the attainment of African independence can be consolidated by the establishment of a Union Government of Africa. Apart from African liberation and African unity (and the accompanying issues of racism, apartheid and the slave trade), other subjects broached in the speeches included African identity (i.e. a distinct form of African-ness which Nkrumah referred to as the African Personality), African nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Importantly, Nkrumah used these speeches as clarion call to what he termed 'positive action'. Hence, they provided an exhortation to the African people to rise up and deal with a crisis/threat believed to be responsible for a breakdown in African society. The speeches were chosen because of their explicit focus on resistance to colonialism/neocolonialism and their subsequent promotion of the Unite or Perish myth by touting the formation of a 'United States of Africa' as the panacea to Africa's challenges. Since the present study argues that Nkrumah's language use, in its promotion of the Unite or Perish myth, constitutes a form of populist performance, the selected speeches were found to be relevant.

5. The Unite or Perish myth as a form of populist performance

The analysis revealed that Nkrumah's populist performance is realized by three main rhetorical strategies: the nomination and predication of social actors and actions, the construction of a man of the people image and the exploitation of familiarity and historical memory. Each of these strategies is subsequently discussed.

5.1 Nomination and predication of social actors and actions

The identification and depiction of social groups as in-groups and out-groups, insiders and outsiders, friends and foes via simplistic dichotomies enable a political actor to project the image of a people-leader who has the supreme interest of the people at heart (Demata, 2017). Nkrumah's construction of the Unite or Perish myth is logically accompanied by the categorization of two

different social groups (i.e. the African people and the imperialists) who are presented as homogeneous in behavior, character and attitude. His view that the African people represent an undifferentiated mass on whose behalf he claims to speak and act can be seen as a populist strategy suggesting that the African masses have conferred authority on him in his noble effort to overthrow the evil system of imperialism and to establish in its place a Union Government of Africa. See excerpt (1).

(1) When the first Congress of the United States met many years ago in Philadelphia one of the delegates sounded the first chord of unity by declaring that they had met in "a state of nature". In other words, they were not in Philadelphia as Virginians, or Pensylvanians, but simply as Americans. This reference to themselves as Americans was in those days a new and strange experience. *May I dare to assert equally on this occasion, Your Excellencies, that we meet here today not as Ghanaians, Guineans, Egyptians, Algerians, Moroccans, Malians, Liberians, Congolese or Nigerians but as Africans – Africans united in our resolve to remain here until we have agreed on the basic principles of a new compact of unity among ourselves which guarantees for us and our future a new arrangement of continental government*. (Inauguration of the Organization of African Unity, 1963)

Addressing African heads of state at the founding of the Organization of African unity, Nkrumah expresses the idea that Africa is a single nation and not a continent consisting of separate countries. This homogeneous representation of Africa as a single entity with one will and one voice is indicative of classic populist notions which assume a strong bond between the people and those who claim to represent them (Taggart, 2000). Not astoundingly and corresponding with a typical populist strategy, Nkrumah claims to be championing a cause that reflects the true interests of the African people and the African nation. He is, therefore, empowered to use the expression 'May I dare to assert' which portrays him as a valiant leader who is prepared to take the necessary risk in order to guarantee the wellbeing of his people. In particular, his use of the verb 'dare' suggests that he is highly motivated and has a passionate desire to lead the African people so much so that he sculpts an identity of one who is courageous, forward-looking and has the ability to decide Africa's future. Such a posture, I argue, is effective in promoting a populist agenda since it boosts the morale of the people and inspires them to put their faith in a strong, decisive and visionary leader capable of making the difficult but necessary decisions that will ensure their welfare.

The central thesis Nkrumah communicates in excerpt (1) (i.e. 'we are one people with a common destiny') is given validity by his reference to the first Congress of the United States via

the *topos* of history (as teacher). This *topos* which connotes that lessons from the past provide guidance for the present and future enables him to compare his proposed Union Government of Africa to the United States of America and to imply that the formation of a Union Government of Africa will make Africa a world super power like the US. Thus, the *topos* of history (as teacher) is combined with the *topos* of comparison to legitimize a certain worldview. It is important to note how Nkrumah interprets the remarks by the Philadelphian delegate, especially the expression 'state of nature', to align with his goal of justifying the homogeneity of the African people and the African nation. An instance of manifest intertextuality, this quotation provides evidence for the argumentative scheme: if the American people do not think of themselves as Philadelphians, Pensylvanians or Virginians but as Americans, then the Africa people can similarly view themselves as a single entity and not as Ghanaians, Nigerians or Egyptians. This conclusion rule is reinforced by the adverb of comparison 'equally' and the additional argument that 'This reference to themselves as Americans was in those days a new and strange experience'. This direct comparison between the two territories can be analyzed as a reductionist mechanism that simplifies and reconstructs an aspect of history in order to give credibility to the Unite or Perish myth, foreground the homogeneity of the African people and portray Nkrumah as representing their general will.

Having identified two antagonistic homogeneous groups (the 'ordinary' Africans and the 'corrupt' imperialists), Nkrumah proceeds to characterize their actions using referential and predicational strategies. Consequently, he instrumentalizes the imperialists as a dangerous threat to 'us' (i.e. our homogeneous African nation) while constructing the African people as the suffering masses and vulnerable victims. By so doing, he promotes an anti-system and a people-centric rhetoric and communicates a worldview that 'offers an account or a critique of [an] existing order', 'pledges to provide a model of a desired future' and outlines 'how [and why] change can and should be brought about' (Heywood, 2000: 22). See excerpts (2) and (3).

(2) For our continent to develop along these lines, ***we must repel a host of enemies. Enemies whom we call imperialists, colonialists and neo-colonialists, in an attempt to categorize their activities, but enemies whose ends are always the same: the undermining and restriction of our independence***. (Opening of the 2nd Conference of African Journalists, 1963)

(3) ***They work laboriously to impede and frustrate our economic development; they employ all manner of means to prevent our unity as a continent***. To destroy our political stability is the obvious method of attacking our independence. (Opening of the 2nd Conference of African Journalists, 1963)

An essential prerequisite for populist mobilization is the construction of an enemy based on an 'us' vs. 'them' polarity and the drawing of an antagonistic frontier (Laclau, 2005). The identification of conspiratorial enemies is useful in inciting action against a tangible adversary and constructing a homogeneous identity for the people who then see themselves in a hostile relationship with their enemies (Taggart, 2000). Described as threats to the people and the 'homeland', conspiratorial enemies are demonized and vilified as they are on the periphery of the populist idea of an undividable unity and considered outsiders (Demata, 2017). In excerpts (2) and (3), Nkrumah's discourse takes on populist overtones in that it represents the imperialists as a single and well-defined African enemy via the *topos* of threat, which means that the perception of danger makes it necessary for one to take a stance against the source of the danger. Through this identification, there is a logic of equivalence in which the imperialist enemy is reduced to a single construct, making it possible for the African people to define themselves as a single unit (with any differences suppressed) in contention with the enemy. Using a membership categorization strategy, Nkrumah describes the imperialists as liable for 'the undermining and restriction of our independence' as 'they work laboriously to impede and frustrate our economic development' by 'employing all manner of means'. Thus, he makes sense of the relationship between two social groups by depicting them into 'types' based on their moral and social characteristics, and implies that Africa's problems stem from colonialist/neocolonialist activities. The characterization Nkrumah projects onto the imperialists, Africa's arch-enemy, is not alarming because as Hofstadter (1966) notes, the enemy explicitly enunciated by a political leader is "a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman: sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving" (p. 31-32).

One of the main features of populist performance is that it is a strong reaction to a sense of extreme crisis instigated by actual or perceived threats to the continued existence of the 'heartland' (Aslanidis, 2016). This is evident in excerpts (2) and (3) as Nkrumah presents the imperialists in pejorative terms and claims that without the neutralization of this threat, Africa is doomed forever. The conditional clause 'For our continent to develop along these lines, we must repel a host of

enemies' in conjunction with statements such as "the attainment of a Union of African States, to my mind, is the only solution to the problems that face us in Africa today" (Nkrumah, 07/04/1960) buttresses this point. Nkrumah's use of the label 'enemy' and the aggressive verb 'repel' generates and intensifies a sense of adversity and distress, fosters a sense of crisis and induces fear and panic. The tension created is heightened by an interaction between emotionally-charged framing and scare-mongering evidenced by lexicalization such as 'hunting grounds for colonialist and neocolonialist enemies of African independence and unity', 'past masters in the policy of divide and rule', 'employing all manner of means to prevent our unity as a continent' and 'we all know the evils of colonialism'. The metaphor 'hunting grounds' suggests that the imperialists are predators (e.g. a hound or a wolf) preying on Africa and the presupposition expression 'we all know the evils of colonialism' depicts them as inherently diabolical and profoundly immoral. There is, thus, evidence for the conceptual metaphor COLONIALISM IS EVIL. The impact of such rhetoric on listeners will most likely obtain their support for Nkrumah's ideas, particularly the establishment of a Union Government of Africa since it is claimed to be the only means of nullifying the threat.

5.2 Construction of a man of the people image

In addition to promoting a hostile relationship between 'the people' and an 'evil system', a populist style revolves around the construction of 'a man of the people' image (Stanley, 2008). That is, populist politics professes to represent the hopes and aspirations of the people against an elite or a system assumed to be suppressing or denying their legitimate rights while articulating these rights and demands as the true desires of the people (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). Nkrumah's discourse displays this populist feature in that by his creation of the Unite or Perish myth, he projects the identity of a trustworthy leader with practical wisdom, goodwill and virtue. This character construction enhances his image as a patriot and enables him to position himself as the man to deliver Africa from the doldrums. See excerpts (4) and (5).

(4) But Africa does not seek vengeance. It is against her very nature to harbor malice*; over two hundred million of our people cry out with one voice of tremendous power – and what do we say? We* do not ask for death for our oppressors, *we* do not pronounce wishes of ill-fate for our slave masters, *we make an assertion of a just and positive demand*. (United Nations General Assembly, 1960)

(5) ***Our voice*** booms across the oceans and mountains, over the hills and valleys, in the desert places and through the vast expanse of mankind's habitation***, and it calls out for the freedom of Africa: Africa wants her freedom! Africa must be free! It is a simple call, but it is also a signal lighting a red warning to those who would lend to ignore it***. (United Nations General Assembly, 1960)

It is noteworthy that excerpts (4) and (5) were culled from Nkrumah's speech at the United Nations General Assembly, especially since this discursive event is probably the biggest political platform politicians can get to diffuse their ideas and project their country. Cognizant of this massive 'frontstage' (Wodak, 2011), Nkrumah takes full advantage of it to carve an image of 'Africa's main man'. Hence, despite attending the Assembly as Ghana's president, he decides to cast himself in the mold of an African leader (possibly Africa's would-be president) representing the motherland. In this capacity, he uses his speech to convey empathy for the African people, address their resentment and assume the position of their Messiah. The argumentative scheme underlying excerpts (4) and (5) and indeed the entire speech from which they are taken suggests that Nkrumah is the perfect leader for Africa as he is well-informed about the challenges confronting the continent, knows the needs of everyone, would act conscientiously and would safeguard Africa's interests (and protect the 'heartland'). He illustrates his knowledge of the continent by stating that the African people do not seek revenge against the colonialists since it is unnatural for them to harbor malice. The personification of Africa as a compassionate person who can never be vengeful and the lexical choice 'nature' – implying that the African people are intrinsically good – realize an exaggeration and intensification function, transferring same/similar qualities to Nkrumah. Thus, Nkrumah is depicted as an embodiment of altruism and a people-leader with Africa's needs at heart.

A key feature of populist performance, as already mentioned, is the presentation of the concerns of the people as an expression of their general will. In this vein, Nkrumah exploits the *topos* of contrast by contrasting what he reckons to be the definitive hope of the African people with what is not: 'We do not ask for death for our oppressors, we do not pronounce wishes of ill-fate for our slave masters, we make an assertion of a just and positive demand'. Combining metaphors of nature (i.e. the use of oceans, mountains, hills, valleys and desert places) with personification, Nkrumah claims that this just and positive demand is being made by the 'over two hundred million of our people' as 'they cry out with one voice of tremendous power'. The phrase 'one voice' re-echoes the populist notion of Africa as one people with a common identity and a

common destiny and the phrasal verb 'cry out' achieves an emotionalization and intensification function which expresses a sense of urgency for African freedom and unity. This clarion call is so strong that it is not only a passionate pronouncement, but also a stern warning – that is, 'it is also a signal lighting a red warning to those who would lend to ignore it'. Thus, through his discourse, Nkrumah embodies the will of the African people and communicates on their behalf what in his estimation are their most important desires. Through his instantiation, especially in his use of the conceptual metaphor AFRICA IS A PERSON, Nkrumah can be said to be engaging in an image-building exercise that entails his prioritization of what the African people need or want. That is, he seems to be 'having the right intentions', 'thinking right', 'sounding right', 'looking right' and 'telling the right story' (Charteris-Black, 2014: 94).

Nkrumah's dual positioning as savior of the people and representing the people as one of their own is another way by which he constructs a man of the people image. Adopting a discourse of resistance realized by phraseology such as 'against apartheid', 'against racialism', 'against colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism', Nkrumah expresses anti-establishment views that portray him as 'being one of us', 'saving us from them' and 'knowing what we want' (Wodak, 2015). See excerpts (6) and (7).

(6) To build Africa which must be Africa liberated from exploitation, Africa just and strong, *we must build with the people and for the people*. Africa must win through to real independence; and the only road open to us is the one whose first station was the Summit Conference of Addis Ababa. *We must now press on quickly to a Union Government of Africa*. (Opening of the 2nd Conference of African Journalists, 1963)

(7) *Those who say that a continental government of Africa is illusory are deceiving themselves. Worse, they are deceiving their people, who see in the unity of our continent the way to a better life*. They ignore the lessons of history. If the United States of America could do it, if the Soviet Union could do it, if India could do it, why not Africa? (Opening of the 2nd Conference of African Journalists, 1963)

In excerpts (6) and (7), not only does Nkrumah present himself as one abreast of the needs of the African people, but also, he maintains that it is his solemn responsibility to address these needs, irrespective of the challenges, since he is alert to (imminent) threats and dangers. Hence, employing the *topoi* of threat, savior, urgency and responsibility (Wodak, 2015), he attempts to revert power to the people and re-establish popular sovereignty (Mény & Surel, 2002). It is instructive that the immediate audience of the speech from which the excerpts were taken are

African journalists. As Nkrumah states later in the speech: "our revolutionary African press has a vital part to play in the revolution which is now sweeping over the continent" by explaining the importance of forming a Union Government of Africa. In the excerpts, there is evidence of the populist idea of a politics of will and decision as Nkrumah asserts that 'we must build with the people and for the people', thereby foregrounding the people's concern. This notion of people-focusing is strengthened by Nkrumah as he unequivocally states the kind of nation he thinks the African people need: 'an Africa liberated from exploitation and one that is just and strong'. This enunciation can be analyzed as an instance of a populist style wary of compromise and accommodation (Canovan, 2005). As is characteristic of a populist style, Nkrumah's portrayal of himself as the man able to divine Africa's most important needs is often expressed via connotations of an intense feeling and knowledge that sometimes transcends logic. So, he regards the founding of the Organization of African Unity as 'the first station on the only road to African peace and freedom'. The use of journey metaphors such as 'road' and 'station' based on the conceptual metaphor AFRICAN UNITY IS A JOURNEY TO FREEDOM AND PROSPERITY provides meaning and purpose to a difficult assignment by positively evaluating sociopolitical goals that are deemed worthwhile (Charteris-Black, 2005). Hence, their usage establishes a strong connection between Nkrumah and the people by implying that the people of Africa must accept short-term suffering for the long-term worthy goal of African unity. The supernatural ability Nkrumah associates the African unification dream with, thus, reinforces his double positioning as savior of the people of Africa and as representing their supreme interests against a destructive system. This is because he establishes a direct link between the formation of a Union Government of Africa and Africa's blissful future and suggests that he has resolved to make African unity a reality no matter the cost.

Apart from describing African unity as inexorable despite the fact that the situation on the ground was far more challenging, Nkrumah attacks the (perceived) opponents of this epic vision, including other African heads who might have a different opinion on the kind of cooperation that should be forged among the various African states. He submits that such leaders were 'deceiving themselves' (making them delusional), 'deceiving their people' (making them traitors) and 'ignoring the lessons of history' (making them ignoramus). Again, Nkrumah exploits the *topos* of history as teacher and the *topos* of comparison by comparing Africa to the US, the former USSR and India in order to provide a justification for a Union Government of Africa. And by considering other African leaders who had their reservations about a Union Government of Africa as deceiving

their people, Nkrumah valorizes the people's concern. That is, whereas he is in touch with the needs of the people and is vigorously pursuing their cause, those African leaders who have issues with an African Revolutionary Republic are accused of being disconnected from the African people's desires. Although Nkrumah's discursive positioning as 'Africa's main man' can be described as a form of self-aggrandizement, it can also be viewed as inspiring and emancipatory in the struggle for African independence in the 1950s/1960s, resulting in his being considered by many as a visionary, a true African (cf. Thabo Mbeki's 'I am an African speech' of 1996), the pride of Africa, Africa's man of destiny and a man ahead of his time (cf. Botwe-Asamoah, 2005).

5.3 Exploitation of familiarity and historical memory

Nkrumah's populist performance is also evident in his appropriation of colonialism as a culturally shared African experience in a way that evokes familiarity and historical memory as a populist strategy. Thus, his consistent reference to Africa's painful history with colonialism in order to validate the establishment of a Union Government of Africa can be seen to concur with a populist valorization of an awful experience of the African people (Ylä-Anttila, 2017). See excerpts (8) and (9).

> (8) Legislation has turned many millions of Africans into helots in their own land. ***It will take all the tricks of expurgation and the greatest manipulation of truth ever fashioned to wipe out of the pages of history the dreadful things and monstrous wrong that have been inflicted on our people by those who came here, so they said, to bring their civilizing mission to this vast and great continent***. (Nationalists' Conference of African Freedom Fighters, 1962)

> (9) There is not one of us who has not, in a minor or major degree, ***felt the oppressive heel of colonial rule. I am not making this point merely in order to harrow you with ugly memories. Many of you have been confronted only too recently with the shocking actualities of calculated oppression to be able at this moment to push them out of mind. I raise the point so that it will stay in your minds*** when you may be tempted by the seductive promises of neo-colonialism. (Nationalists' Conference of African Freedom Fighters, 1962)

This paper argues that the appropriation of collective experiences and a shared past for sociopolitical gains, including nationalism, patriotism and enemy construction, can be a potent way of 'doing populism'. In excerpts (8) and (9), Nkrumah draws on the African people's familiarity with colonialism to make the point that he is seeking their best interests in the wake of the new colonialism (i.e. neocolonialism), asserting that 'There is not one of us who has not, in a

minor or major degree, felt the oppressive heel of colonial rule'. It is instructive that he uses the mental verb 'feel' (instead of an alternative like 'witnessed') as it signifies the actual experiencing of an unpleasant emotion via an imagery of physical torture and mental trauma. This interpretation is amplified by the metaphorical expression 'oppressive heel of colonial rule', which stresses the African people's maltreatment under a terrible regime given the conceptualization COLONIALISM IS EVIL.

Using a strategy of assimilation and collectivization (van Leeuwen, 2008), Nkrumah submits that not only is every single person in his audience well acquainted with the dreaded colonial experience, but also every African has to a greater or lesser degree been affected by this oppression. Hence, his use of the all-encompassing expression 'There is not one of us who has not …', which makes an appeal to a familiar experience rather than more abstract political notions, highlights the populist notion of foregrounding the 'ordinary folk' (Ylä-Anttila, 2017). The strong connection he establishes with and among the African people is strengthened and the tension is raised as he proceeds to give specific details of their suffering owing to their collective experience. So, he states that 'legislation has turned many millions of Africans into helots in their own land' and 'dreadful and monstrous wrong have been inflicted on our people by those who came here'. The emotional charge he gives to his enunciation is intensified by his pronouncement that the African people will always recall the atrocities of colonialism since they have been deeply ingrained in their minds and can never be wiped out of the pages of history. Thus, he exploits recollections, historical memory and appeals to history (Wodak et al., 2009) to underline the common experience he associates the African people with and to warn them of what he describes as 'the real character of colonialism'.

Moreover, he utilizes the concept of popular memory (Wodak et al., 2009) as part of his 'familiarity frame', affirming that 'I am not making this point merely in order to harrow you with ugly memories [but] I raise the point so that it will stay in your minds'. He, thus, suggests that the experience of colonialism has a permanent place in the consciousness of the African people and can be considered integral to the shared pool of knowledge of the African society. Based on this collective memory, he is emboldened to make a popular appeal to the African people – or even foist a moral imperative on them – to approve of his fight against the entities who wield so much power and privilege to the disadvantage of the African people. It can, therefore, be said that

Nkrumah's political appropriation of familiarity realizes an inclusion function which enables the creation of a common ground with the African masses even if some of them did not agree (fully) with the proposition of a Union Government of Africa.

Nkrumah's identification of Africa with a certain bad patch in history as well as the subsequent entrenchment of this agonizing experience within the collective memory of the African society is made more persuasive by its interaction with a discourse of fear. Exploiting the reminiscence of colonialism (together with the accompanying notions of apartheid, racialism and the slave trade) and the memorialization of the African victims of these systems, Nkrumah accentuates the menace of neocolonialism in post-independence Africa and the resultant fear of Africa's insecurity in an attempt to recruit support for the founding of a Union Government of Africa. See excerpts (10), (11) and (12).

> (10) Even while we deliberate today, *men, women and children die daily as a result of military action or police massacre.* At the southern end of the continent, *the defenders of apartheid, the worst form of racial arrogance, have not only boasted openly of the new military equipment they are assembling to intimidate Africans who resort to non-violent positive action against that iniquitous system, but they have recently unleashed the murderous fire of Saracen tanks upon them, an action which has hit the conscience of the world*. (Positive Action Conference for Peace and Security in Africa, 1960)

> (11) *The memories of the tragedy of Sakiet and of the relentless harassment from ground and sky of the people of Kenya, are still vivid in our memory. At this juncture,* Comrades, I would like to ask you to stand up and observe two minutes silence for all those Africans who have been the victims of colonial and racial brutality. (Positive Action Conference for Peace and Security in Africa, 1960)

> (12) *Of late, atrocities of the worst possible kind have been perpetrated against Africans. The horror of Portuguese atrocities* appalls all right-minded people. *The massacres* at Dembos, Gulungo Alto, Ambaca, Dondo, Cacuso, Libolo and others, will be to the eternal shame of the present Portuguese regime. Troops drafted into Baixe de Cassange to shoot down Africans demonstrating against abusive practices, killed over eight thousand innocent people. Planes bombed unarmed, defenseless men and women. The Portuguese record in Angola, in Mozambique, Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe is a long, repetitive story of murder, robbery and active persecution of Africans. (Nationalists' Conference of African Freedom Fighters, 1962)

In excerpts (10), (11) and (12), Nkrumah's political appropriation of Africa's history with colonialism interacts with a discourse of fear as he carefully and vividly recounts several horrifying consequences of colonialism across the continent. Moving from the general to the specific,

Nkrumah speaks of atrocities that have been perpetrated against Africans and proceeds to list some of these misdeeds in various parts of Africa. The heinous crimes Nkrumah attributes to the colonialists are made more intense given his choice of violent expressions such as 'brutality', 'killed', 'massacres', 'murder', 'murderous fire' and 'shoot down'. The affective power of these lexical choices is heightened by phraseology such as 'the horror of Portuguese atrocities', 'the intensity of the new repression' and 'a long repetitive story of murder, robbery and active persecution of Africans'. Additionally, the derogatory attributes he uses in categorizing the activities of the colonialists are contrasted with positively evaluated descriptions such as 'unarmed defenseless men and women', 'thousand innocent people' and 'men, women and children' in reference to the African people, thereby emphasizing the callousness of the colonial system.

Altogether, Nkrumah's use of the aforementioned descriptions, forming part of a membership categorization strategy, has a powerful emotive force that activates feelings of horror and trepidation, more so when they are examined in light of the hyperbolic statement 'men, women and children die daily as a result of military action or police massacre' (Nartey, 2020b). Again, Nkrumah maintains that the iniquities of colonialism against Africa, including the shooting of innocent Africans from lethal Saracen tanks, is entrenched in popular African memory, noting that 'these crimes are still vivid in our memory'. An essential aspect of historical memory is remembrance (Wodak et al., 2009). Consequently, by making his audience observe a two-minute silence in honor of all Africans who have died as a result of colonial and racial brutality, Nkrumah does not only memorialize these individuals, but also encourages his audience to ponder a dreadful experience, identify with it and, most importantly, vow to resist such an occurrence or its manifestation in other forms (e.g. neocolonialism).

A final point to be made here is that the events that Nkrumah refers to as colonial atrocities constitute a shared knowledge and will, therefore, be obvious to his immediate audience. For instance, the tragedy of Sakiet is in reference to the bombing of the Tunisian city during the Algerian-French conflict in 1958 and the shooting down of Africans at Baixe de Cassange happened in response to cotton farm workers boycott in 1961 in northern Angola. Hence, this paper does not downplay the seriousness of these events. The argument being made, however, is that they enable Nkrumah, especially given his choice of words in talking about these events, to ideologically appropriate familiar and unpleasant experiences in the past so as to justify the

exceptional nature of the threat to the 'homeland' (i.e. Africa) and to provide a legitimate rationale for the anti-imperialist and anti-system strategy he advocates (i.e. a Union Government of Africa).

6. Conclusion

This paper has presented a discourse-historical analysis of Kwame Nkrumah's construction of 'the African people' via his formulation of the Unite or Perish myth. It analyzed how political myth can be used to frame a populist representation that valorizes the 'ordinary folk' and promotes strong anti-establishment sentiments. It was found that Nkrumah's populist performance was realized by three main discursive strategies: nomination and predication of social actors and actions, his construction of a man of the people image and the exploitation of familiarity and historical memory. These strategies were expressed through various linguistic and pragmatic resources, including labeling, lexicalization and membership categorization devices, and their interaction with rhetorical tropes such as metaphor, contrast and hyperbole. These lexico-syntactic tools enabled Nkrumah to construct himself as a selfless leader with righteous intentions and as one mandated by the African people to represent their interests, protect the 'heartland' from enemy forces and restore power back to Africans. The possible relationship between political myth and populism, as noted at the outset of this paper, has hardly been discussed in the literature on political myth-making. Hence, by arguing for an isomorphic relationship between mythic themes and populist performance in political discourse analysis, this paper furthers understanding on the form and function of myth in politics. As has been demonstrated in this study, myth helps politicians to exploit the notion of 'the people' conceptualized as a united whole, an undifferentiated mass and a 'homeland' that is opposed to the prevailing system. It also enables a politician to (claim to) represent the general will of the ordinary people against an undesirable *status quo*. Consequently, this study contends that populism can be explicitly conceptualized as an essential component of political mythology and submits that any theory of myth in politics must include or account for populist notions. In general, the linguistic analysis of myth in politics has been restricted to Western politicians; hence, by examining the discourse of a pioneering Pan-African leader, this study contributes to an understanding of political myth-making in a context/setting underexplored in the literature. And by analyzing the discourse on colonialism from the point of view of the colonized, this study illustrates the role of language/discourse and post/independence leaders in political decolonization.

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