Decolonising cosmopolitanism: An anthropological reading of Immanuel Kant and Kwame Nkrumah on the world as one

Paula Uimonen
Stockholm University, Sweden

Abstract
This article offers an anthropological reading of the works of Immanuel Kant and Kwame Nkrumah. By doing so it seeks to expose the Eurocentric and racist ontology that lies behind dominant contemporary forms of cosmopolitanism. The article draws attention to the possibility of a more egalitarian vision of the “world as one” that can be derived from the perspective of an African philosophical viewpoint. Rather than regarding African social theory as a subordinate or subaltern mode of apprehending the world, it places African philosophy on a par with European traditions of philosophical thought. By focusing on some of the central tenets of cosmopolitanism, it argues that Nkrumah, by insisting on freedom and equality for all of humanity, had articulated a more genuinely cosmopolitan ontology than any that can be derived from the philosophy of Kant. The article argues that an engagement with critical anthropology enables us to imagine forms of decolonised cosmopolitanism which are genuinely both inclusive and egalitarian.

Keywords
Cosmopolitanism, creolization, decolonisation, anthropology, Kant, Nkrumah, Pan-Africanism, Ghana

Corresponding author:
Paula Uimonen, Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, Sweden. Email: paula.uimonen@socant.su.se
The genealogy of cosmopolitanism is usually traced through Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the German Enlightenment philosopher whose work is considered foundational to modern cosmopolitan theory. Kant elaborated his moral philosophy on human nature and cosmopolitan rights in works like *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* ([1784] 2009) and *Toward Perpetual Peace* ([1795] 2006). Kant was born and died in Königsberg Prussia (now Kaliningrad in Russia). In 1740 he enrolled at the University of Königsberg, in 1755 he received his PhD and in 1770 he became a full professor. In 1781, Kant published *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is considered one of the most important works in Western philosophy. In addition to philosophy, Kant also lectured in anthropology and geography, although his pseudo anthropology is not to be equated with anthropology as a modern scientific discipline. When he discontinued the course due to old age, Kant published his lectures in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic View* ([1798] 1974). Unlike some other scholars at the time, Kant never travelled far from his home town Königsberg, an intellectual and cultural centre in the Kingdom of Prussia, later the German Empire.

Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972) was the first president of the first Sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from colonial rule, Ghana in 1957, and a staunch Pan-Africanist. Complementary to his struggle for Africa’s liberation, Nkrumah was a key figure in the non-aligned movement’s struggle against imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, beyond bipolar Cold War politics. Nkrumah was an influential and controversial political leader, hailed as the Victorious Leader (*Osagyefo*) after leading Ghana to independence, later accused of being a tyrant and ousted from power in a CIA-backed and UK-assisted military coup in 1966, while on his way to Hanoi for peace brokering in the Vietnam war. Nkrumah was also a radical social theorist and prolific writer. He published over a dozen books, including *Africa Must Unite* (1963), *Consciencism* (1964), and *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). He wrote an autobiography *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* ([1957] 2001) and his lifework has also been documented by his research assistant and literary executrix June Milne (2000). Nkrumah grew up in rural Ghana under humble circumstances and completed college education in Accra. He worked and studied philosophy in the United States from 1935 to 1945, as well as anthropology and law in the United Kingdom, but cut his studies short when returning to Ghana in 1947 to lead the movement for independence. After being ousted from power, he lived in exile in Guinea where he was appointed Co-President. Unlike Kant, and with the benefit of two centuries of improvement in transport infrastructure, Nkrumah travelled widely around the world, in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe.

Cosmopolitanism is here approached as a sense of the world as one, with political and cultural dimensions, capturing society and community at the global level as well as knowledge and appreciation of cultural diversity (Hannerz, 2007). Not surprisingly, anthropologists tend to view cosmopolitanism in relational terms, with an emphasis on diversity and pluralism (e.g. Werbner, 2008). More recent scholarship inquires whose cosmopolitanism, thus calling for a more situated and
processual approach, to break through the Eurocentrism, elitism and male-dominance of earlier scholarship (Glick Schiller and Irving, 2015). In addition to calling for different genealogies of cosmopolitanism (Tihanov, 2015), and more postcolonial analyses (Gilroy, 2015), this work recognizes the cosmopolitan perspective of various struggles for social justice in their “commitment to a common humanity” (Glick Schiller, 2015: 32), including the “Pan-Africanist project” (Glick Schiller and Irving, 2015: 1). Building on this work, I wish to advance more radical rethinking by confronting the Eurocentric racist ontology of Kantian cosmopolitanism, while identifying more genuinely cosmopolitan ontologies, in this case through Nkrumah’s political philosophy. In recognition of the dialectics of Afro-modernity and Euro-modernity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012), and the relationality of Europe and Africa (Ferguson, 2006), I insist on placing African philosophy on par with European philosophy, rather than outside it as an alternative, vernacular or subaltern philosophy. In so doing, I respond to the call for social theory from the South (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012), while building on recent efforts to decolonise political theory through creolization (Gordon, 2014). My aim is not just to decentre cosmopolitanism, but to push for its decolonisation, especially within and by way of the anthroplogy of cosmopolitanism.

A closer reading of Kant’s Eurocentric cosmopolitanism

Kantian cosmopolitanism is typically referred to through his essay Toward Perpetual Peace ([1795] 2006), and to some extent his earlier essay Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim ([1784] 2009). Kant was a moral philosopher, but he was also concerned with politics, and over time he became more explicit about moral politics, not the least questions of freedom, equality and cosmopolitan rights. Kant repeatedly used the term cosmopolitan and thought of himself as a citizen of the world, his work encompassing the nature of the human species/race, world history, world citizenship and world society. But as Mignolo (2000: 735) has pointed out: “Kant’s cosmopolitanism presupposes that it could only be thought out from one particular geopolitical location: that of the heart of Europe, of the most civilized nations.” Contrary to his cosmopolitan claims, Kant’s work should thus be appraised in the context of scientific and moral claims that sought to assert the positional superiority of Europeans vis-à-vis non-European peoples and cultures (Said, [1978] 2003).

In the Idea for a Universal History, Kant ([1784] 2009) offered a systemic analysis of history, a teleological view on humanity’s progress toward its ultimate goal of constituting a moral whole: “a universal cosmopolitan condition, as the womb in which all original predispositions of the human species will be developed” (pp. 20–21, emphasis in original). He concluded: “[O]ne will discover a regular course of improvement of state constitutions in our part of the world (which will probably someday give laws to all the others)” (p. 21).

It has been suggested that “the proper way to read” this passage is to “read it against the background of the racial hierarchy that Kant still defended during the
1780s” (Kleingeld, 2009: 184). The notion that “European legislation for the rest of the world” was part of the “final end of history” should be understood in relation to “other comments he made elsewhere, to the effect that most non-white ‘races’ are not capable of self-legislation” (Kleingeld, 2009: 184, emphasis in original). Thus, when Kant asserted that only his part of the world (imperial European nations) contained the “germ of enlightenment” required to reach the “cosmopolitan aim” of world history (Kant, [1784] 2009: 22–23), he repeated a view “according to which many non-whites are not capable of governing themselves” (Kleingeld, 2009: 184).

In *Toward Perpetual Peace* ([1795] 2006), Kant elaborated his political theory, arguing for a universal law of nations, a federation of free states and world citizenship. Again, his theories were based on what he considered to be human nature:

> The state of nature (*status naturalis*) is not a state of peace among human beings who live next to one another but a state of war, that is, if not always an outbreak of hostilities, then at least the constant threat of such hostilities. Hence the state of peace must be established. (pp. 72–73, emphasis in original)

Instead of viewing war as an aberration, as an anti-thesis to social life, Kant proposed war to be the precondition of human life. While his view was undoubtedly shaped by the many wars that raged in Europe at the time, it could hardly be representative of the world at large. Meanwhile, Kant’s views on the innateness of war could be interpreted as a legitimization of the warfare of European expansion around the world, while the solution for peace naturalized European colonization, transforming relations of military conquest and commercial exploitation into legal relations.

Kant’s essay is often heralded as a foundational doctrine for a cosmopolitan world society, and one of the most frequently cited passages is his second preliminary article (p. 68): “No independently existing state (irrespective of whether it is large or small) shall be able to be acquired by another state through inheritance, exchange, purchase or gift.”

While this article is often interpreted as critique against colonialism (e.g. Kleingeld, 2009; Mignolo, 2000), much less attention is paid to the paragraph that follows it, which suggest that Kant was primarily concerned with the expansive ambitions of states within Europe: “Everyone knows the danger that the presumptive right to this manner of acquisition has brought to Europe – for the custom is unknown in other parts of the world –, even in the most recent times” (Kant, [1784] 2006: 68).

As indicated by the last few lines, “for the custom is unknown in other parts of the world,” Kant seems to have ignored non-European state formations as well as the realpolitik of colonial expansion. His Eurocentric perspective appears to have discarded a history of conquests and acquisitions by non-European states and empires, not to mention the brutality of European colonial expansion that was all too well known to the victims of progress.
In his third definitive article for perpetual peace, *cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality*, Kant ([1795] 2006) discussed the rights of world citizenship in terms of *hospitality*: “the right of a stranger not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival on the other’s territory” (p. 82). He recognized “a right to visit,” not “the right of a guest,” springing from the “right of common possession of the surface of the earth.” By contrast, he noted some inhospitable actions of “the civilized”:

If one compares with this the inhospitable behavior of the civilized states in our part of the world, especially the commercial ones, the injustice that the latter show when visiting foreign lands and peoples (which to them is one and the same as conquering those lands and peoples) takes on terrifying proportions. America, the negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape, etc., were at the time of their discovery lands that they regarded as belonging to no one, for the native inhabitants counted as nothing to them. In East India (Hindustan), they brought in foreign troops under the pretext of merely intending to establish trading posts. But with these they introduced the oppression of the native inhabitants, the incitement of the different states involved to expansive wars, famine, unrest, faithlessness, and the whole litany of evils that weigh upon the human species. (pp. 82–83)

While this exposition of the litany of evils carried out by the “civilized” offers poignant criticism of colonial expansion, it does not address or challenge the systemic nature of European conquest and exploitation. By emphasizing the practices of certain states, it appears that Kant criticised inhospitable actions within the parameters of commerce, rather than as an integral part of Europe’s civilizing mission. Meanwhile, as much as he deplored the conquest by civilized intruders of what they considered to be lands without owners, he still maintained that the former were civilized, while the latter were not, thus retaining the positional superiority of European civilization.

As much as Kant deplored these inhospitable practices, his moral judgement seemed particularly averse to trade and commerce:

The worst part of this (or from the standpoint of a moral judge, the best part) is that they do not even profit from this violence, that all of these trading companies stand near the point of collapse, that the Sugar Islands, that seat of the cruelest and most premeditated form of slavery, do not yield any return, but rather serve, only indirectly, a not very commendable purpose, namely, of training sailors for the navies, and hence ultimately serve the warfare in Europe, doing this for powers which make much ado about their piety, and who, while drinking injustice like water, consider their being the chosen ones to be a matter of orthodoxy. (Kant, [1795] 2006: 84)

In his writings, Kant appears to have been quite unaware of the commercial success of colonial exploitation. Not only was colonialism profitable, it was a precondition for Europe’s progress, since the advancement of European states
was only made possible through exploitation of the rest of the world, through slavery, colonialism and imperialism. Granted, Kant approved of China and Japan for having “wisely, limited such interaction,” and underlined that “the violation of right at any one place on earth is felt in all places,” thus urging for the necessity of “cosmopolitan right” (Kant, [1795] 2006: 83–84). Even so, by emphasising the non-profitability of trading companies, Kant seems to have interpreted colonial expansion through a veil of idealism that ignored the materiality of human existence.

It has been suggested that Kant’s views changed with time, becoming more cosmopolitan. Kleingeld (2009: 185) argues that in Toward Perpetual Peace, Kant abandoned the idea that Europe should legislate for other countries and instead “envisions a world in which people of different colors and on different continents together make public laws to regulate their interaction peacefully and in accordance with the normative principles of rights” (p. 185). This argument is based on Kant’s elaborations on hospitality. But seeing to what extent the “civilized states” in Europe had already violated principles of hospitality through violent colonial expansion, it comes across as rather hypocritical to invoke the right of hospitality as a basis for a cosmopolitan constitution, designed by the perpetrators of inhospitable acts.

Despite his Eurocentric perspective, Kant’s thoughts on world citizenship and cosmopolitan right have been heralded as milestones in modern cosmopolitan theory. His efforts to formulate the legal preconditions for an international order, a federation of free states (ideally a world republic), based on the principle of cosmopolitan right, or public human right, have been applauded in philosophy as well as political theory. Kant’s influence on subsequent generations of philosophers as well as political and social scientists is unmistakable, while his thinking has inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as international law. Given this legacy, it is worth pondering to what extent Kantian cosmopolitanism has perpetuated a worldview that assures the supremacy of European positionality in world society, to the detriment of a more cosmopolitan world order?

Kant’s racist worldview and the ontological paradox of anthropology

Kant lectured in anthropology for some three decades, which would presume a cosmopolitan perspective on the world, since anthropology aspires to be the most cosmopolitan of disciplines, offering a holistic understanding of the human condition in all its cultural diversity (e.g. Hannerz, 2007; Kahn, 2003). Within anthropology, Kant’s early work on pragmatic anthropology has largely gone unnoticed. However, recent analyses of Kant from other disciplines, especially philosophy, have interrogated his anthropology, especially when it comes to his race theory (for an overview, see Mikkelsen, 2013). A closer look at Kant’s
anthropology reveals that his Eurocentric perspective on world history and world society rested on a racist ontology that contradicted, even undermined his cosmopolitan claims (cf. Eze, 1997; Hedrick, 2008). Seeing that anthropologists of cosmopolitanism tend to perpetuate the Kantian genealogy of cosmopolitan theory, without challenging or even noting its racist underpinnings, it is perhaps time to turn a more critical eye to this ontological paradox.

In the Preface of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic View* ([1798] 1974), Kant summarized the aim and scope of his lectures on *knowledge of the world: anthropology*, which dealt with “an understanding of man in terms of his species, as an earthly being endowed with reason” (p. 3). He explained that anthropology for pragmatic purposes was not merely knowledge of the world, but concerned with “knowledge of man as a citizen of the world,” which could advance the cultural progress of education and assign it to the use of the world.

Interestingly, Kant ([1798] 1974) noted how anthropological knowledge was expanded through travelling:

One of the ways of extending the range of anthropology is traveling, or at least reading travelogues. But if we want to know what we should look for abroad in order to extend it, we must first have acquired knowledge of men at home, by associating with our fellow townsman and countrymen. Without a plan of this kind (which already presupposes knowledge of men), the citizen of the world remains very limited in his anthropology. (p. 4)

Ironically, the footnote in this passage justified Kant’s own lack of travel, as he noted that in “[a] city such as Königsberg [. . .] this knowledge can be acquired even without traveling.” (p. 4)

Kant’s lack of travel may explain the cognitive dissonance in his knowledge of the world, which he reproduced in his anthropology lectures. As pointed out by Eze (1997: 129), Kant used his personal notes for his lectures, which meant that “Kant’s reliance on explorers, missionaries, seekers after wealth and fame, colonizers, etc., and their travelogues provided, or served to validate, Kant’s worst characterizations of non-European ‘races’ and cultures.” While this could be written off as the shortcomings of a prototype of armchair anthropology, it should be kept in mind that at the time of Kant’s lecturing more factual accounts of the world were available, but he chose to ignore much of this material. In fact, the Minister of Education exempted Kant from using academic sources, allowing him to use his personal notes instead, since no suitable text-book on the subject was supposedly available (p. 129).

But Kant’s selective reading of the world was not merely an oversight. It has been suggested that at a time when philosophies of Persia, Indian and China were in vogue, certain European philosophers insisted on excluding such works, advocating a history of philosophy that ascertained a genealogy from the Greeks to Immanuel Kant (Park, 2014). Kant and his followers thus shaped a philosophical canon that was both Eurocentric and racist (Park, 2014; Van Norden, 2017).
Eurocentric approach to knowledge of the world should be understood in the context of scholarly work at the time. To Kant and his fellow scholars, “the idea of ‘world’” did not mean the world at large, but only “the bourgeois public sphere,” excluding the lower classes as well as non-Europeans and women (Zammito, 2002: 18).

In his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* ([1764] 2011), Kant sketched some of his anthropological insights into humans as moral agents. He dwelled on the subtleties in moral character of white Europeans (French, Germans, English, Italians, Spaniards), but when it came to other parts of the world, he had little to say about morality. Instead he noted the grotesqueries of Indians and Chinese, the ridiculousness and stupidity of the Negro, and the lack of feelings among savages in North America (pp. 58–60). Underlying his categorization of moral character was “race”:

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although very many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something great in art or science or shown any other praiseworthy quality, while among the whites there are always those who rise up from the lowest rabble and through extraordinary gifts earn respect in the world. So essential is the difference between these two human kinds, and it seems to be just as great with regard to the capacities of mind as it is with respect to color. (p. 59, emphasis added)

Over a decade later Kant offered a taxonomy of races, a racial hierarchy that asserted white supremacy, in his essay *Of the Different Human Races* ([1777] 2000). He related racial characteristics to climactic conditions, thus combining his anthropology and geography. True to his Euro-centered perspective, Kant identified the “lineal root genus” of the human species to “the area between 31 and 52 degrees latitude in the old world”, where “the greatest riches of earth’s creation are found” (pp. 19–20). These people were “white, indeed, brunette inhabitants.” The nearest deviation from this origin was the “noble blond form.” Kant’s summary account of the “four existing races” and the “natural causes that account for their origin” was a racial hierarchy that validated white supremacy (p. 20):

- Lineal root genus: white of brownish colour
- First race: Noble blond (northern Europe), from humid cold
- Second race: Copper red (America), from dry cold
- Third race: Black (Senegambia), from humid heat
- Fourth race: Olive-yellow (Asian-Indians), from dry heat

In his final publication on anthropology, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic View* ([1798] 1974), Kant discussed the character of persons, the sexes, nations and
species in *Part II Anthropological Characterization*. He distinguished between physical and moral character, the former referring to man as “a being belonging to the world of sense, or nature,” while moral character denoted man as a “rational being, one endowed with freedom” (p. 151). While he recognized a great deal of variety in physical character, he was more restrictive on moral character: either you had it or you did not.

Kant only deemed five nations to be worthy of moral character, England and France as well as Spain, Italy and Germany, thus reproducing the racial hierarchy of his earlier publications. As noted by Mignolo (2000: 735), Kant’s categorization was “not alphabetical but imperial” and his “geopolitical distribution of national characters” was limited to the core of Europe. In Kant’s analysis, character referred to physique and features as well as temperament, thus combining a primordial (biological) understanding of man with a cultural (anthropological).

Interestingly, Kant described Germans as a people of good character, with a cosmopolitan detachment from their homeland and hospitality to visiting foreigners:

In their dealings with others the Germans are characterized by modesty [... ] they have no national pride, and are too cosmopolitan to be deeply attached to their homeland. In their own country, however, they are more hospitable to foreigners than any other nation. (Kant, [1798] 1974: 180)

But the cosmopolitanism of the German character did not extend to all people, for his virtues were modified in a colonial context where his interaction was restricted to fellow Germans: “But when he enters a foreign country *as a colonist* he soon concludes with his compatriots a kind of civil union that, by unity of language and, in part, religion, settles them as a *nation in miniature*” (Kant, [1798] 1974: 179–180, emphasis added).

In Kant’s view, there was no contradiction between cosmopolitan detachment from the homeland and nationalism in a colonial context, since it followed the logic of racist ontology. When interacting with others as a colonist, the cosmopolitan German could be applauded for forming a nation in miniature, since he retained the boundaries of morality (white civilization) by keeping a distance to immoral others (colonial subjects).

Kant’s discussion on racial character, which succeeded the section on national character, was limited to varieties “observed in one and the same race” (p. 182). In his analysis of family stamp, he used the white race as an example, cautioning against proximity of kinship, which resulted in infertility, suggesting that people should “diversify to infinity” instead. But this diversification only pertained to the same race: to “members of the same stock and even of the same clan.” As for the notion of mixing races, Kant concluded with the following warning: “This much we can judge with probability: that a mixture of races (by extensive conquests), which gradually extinguishes their characters, is not beneficial to the human race – all so-called philanthropy notwithstanding” (p. 182).
Seeing that Kant’s *Pragmatic Anthropology* was published towards the end of his career, it would be erroneous to overlook the continuity and uniformity of his racist ontology. Whether explicitly phrased in terms of race or more implicitly as moral character, Kant was consistent in his racialized hierarchization of humanity. It is thus erroneous to conclude that Kant “drops his earlier racial hierarchalism” and that he “starts to criticize the exploitative practices of Europeans on other continents” (Kleingeld, 2009: 186). This is perhaps a wishful reading of what Kant should have written, but it is not backed up by what he actually wrote.

Kant’s racist ontology has been linked to his anthropology, which in turn informed his moral philosophy, along with his cosmopolitan claims. Frierson and Guyer (2011) note that Kant’s discussion of the empirical nature of ethics in *Observations* contained the origins of his moral philosophy and moral anthropology and that “[s]eeds of Kant’s later theory of race, within which racial characteristics are heritable and relatively fixed, are regrettably already found in *Observations*” (p. xxix). In a recent translation of Kant’s earlier texts, Mikkelsen (2013) devotes a section in the introduction to race theory and concludes that Kant expressed views that are “clearly racist not only in tone but also in spirit, if not, necessarily, in ideological intent” (p. 3). One of the most outspoken critics is Eze, who has argued that:

> Strictly speaking, Kant’s anthropology and geography offer the strongest, if not the only, sufficiently articulated theoretical philosophical justification of the superior/inferior classification of “races of men” of any European writer up to this time. (Eze, 1997: 12, emphasis in original)

This ontological paradox points to a problematic relation between anthropology, cosmopolitanism and racism that has yet to be reckoned with. Through Kant, we can see the colonial baggage of anthropology raise its ugly head (Asad, 1973), yet anthropologists of cosmopolitanism continue to refer to Kant’s foundational work, while ignoring his racist ontology. In many instances, the Kantian genealogy is reproduced without much reflection, as a passing note to Kant’s major works, with no mention of its racist underpinnings, or his anthropological claims (e.g. Hannerz, 2007; Werbner, 2008). Although Kahn (2003: 404) is explicitly critical, “Kant’s racism, sexism and classism completely undermine the claim to universalism upon which his philosophical/anthropological system is based,” he still makes an “appeal to anthropologists of a return to Kantian universalism.” More recent works, which acknowledge Kant’s anthropology, simply ignore its racist ontology, focusing instead on Kant’s cosmopolitan ideals (Hart, 2010; Josephides and Hall, 2014). Whether symptomatic of ignorance, oversight or lack of alternatives, the reproduction of a Kantian genealogy of cosmopolitanism contributes to the maintenance of a history of ideas that originates in and perpetuates a racist ontology. If racism is antithetical to cosmopolitanism, which I presume it is, then anthropologists ought to know better than to reproduce such ontological paradoxes.
Of course Kant was not alone in his racist view of the world; he was a man of his times. His work built on and contributed to the work of other Enlightenment thinkers, white males like Buffon, Hume and Linnaeus (Eze, 1997; Mikkelsen, 2013), which points to a more systemic problem, namely the extent to which European Enlightenment rested on a racist ontology that intellectuals have yet to come to terms with (Gilroy, 2015). And it is this wider philosophical context that needs to be dealt with in our efforts to decolonise our minds (cf. Park, 2014; Van Norden, 2017). Racism is not an aberration in a moral whole; it is foundational to systemic inequality and structural inferiorization (Fanon [1964] 1967). If we take serious note of the need to decolonise anthropology (e.g. Allen and Jobson, 2016), then it would seem that the anthropology of cosmopolitanism would be a good place to start.

Nkrumah’s creolized philosophy of consciencism for decolonisation

Kwame Nkrumah’s _Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution_ (1964) was an intellectual tour de force that built upon and departed from Western philosophy, while outlining a new philosophy of worldwide relevance. In his closing words, Nkrumah suggested: “Philosophical consciencism is a general philosophy which admits of application to any country. But it is especially applicable to colonies and newly independent and developing countries” (pp. 117–118). Nkrumah’s aim was to combine philosophy with ideology and to put them to social use, since: “Practice without thought is blind; thought without practice is empty” (p. 78).

In the introduction to _Consciencism_, Nkrumah (1964) situated the study of philosophy in the context of colonialism. He noted the “straight-jacketing” of the colonial system whereby colonial students turned to the colonial metropolis in their yearning for formal education (p. 1). Nkrumah outlined three categories of colonial students. Those who had been handpicked “to become enlightened servants of the colonial administration,” often groomed from an early age so that they “had lost contact early in life with their traditional background” (p. 3). Another category consisted of colonial students who gained access because of their social standing, whose education was a mark of personal distinction and privilege, but whose grasp of historical development and national consciousness were quite limited from their “wobbly pedestal” (p. 3). A third category consisted of numerous ordinary Africans who “sought knowledge as an instrument of national emancipation and integrity” and to whom the value of cultural acquisition through university education hinged on the ability to appreciate is as _free men_. Not surprisingly, Nkrumah concluded; “I was one of this number” (p. 4).
In the first chapter, Nkrumah remarked on how university education affirmed Europe's self-aggrandisement and universalist claims, and the risk of alienation this entailed for colonized students:

The colonized African student, whose roots in his own society are systematically starved of sustenance, is introduced to Greek and Roman history, the cradle history of modern Europe, and he is encouraged to treat this portion of the story of man together with the subsequent history of Europe as the only worthwhile portion. This history is anointed with a universalist flavouring which titillates the palate of certain African intellectuals so agreeably that they become alienated from their own immediate society. (Nkrumah, 1964: 5)

Nkrumah (1964) proceeded with a detailed account of major tenets in European philosophies and the social milieus in which they were developed, thus arguing for the need to understand them in the specific context of Europe’s cultural history, rather than as universal truths (p. 55). He pointed to the linkages between philosophy and ideology, not least in terms of morality, and how ideology used the instruments of political, moral and social theory to bring a specific order into society (p. 59). Nkrumah used history as an example of ideological coercion:

The history of Africa, as presented by European scholars, has been encumbered with malicious myths. It was even denied that we were a historical people. It was said that whereas other continents had shaped history, and determined its course, Africa had stood still, held down by inertia; that Africa was only propelled into history by European contact. (p. 62)

Having exposed the ideological underpinnings of European history writing, Nkrumah urged for an alternative perspective: “Our history needs to be written as the history of our society, not as the story of European adventures” (p. 63).

While maintaining an African-centered perspective, Nkrumah developed a philosophy that drew on European philosophy (dialectical materialism, egalitarianism) and ideology (socialism, humanism) as well as African tradition, to craft an emancipatory philosophy for decolonization, an intellectual revolution to guide a social revolution in Africa, and beyond. Based on a philosophical and cultural appraisal of human nature and society, conscienism was a political philosophy that offered “a body of connected thought” (p. 79), a sophisticated disposition, a worldview, rather than a set of rules or hypotheses.

[Consciencism is the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest the Western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality. The African personality is itself defined by the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society. (p. 79)
Recognising that these different forces could be conflictive, and cognisant of the power of colonialism and neo-colonialism in the Christian/Western segment, Nkrumah emphasized dynamic unity rather than confrontational rejection, to ensure society’s progress (p. 68).

Consciencism offered a blueprint for decolonization that embraced modernity, while denouncing colonial and neocolonial power structures. It echoed the “cosmopolitan scale” of decolonization articulated by Fanon (Gilroy, 2015: 40) in his famous quote: “For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavour to create a new man” (Fanon [1961] 2004: 239).

Nkrumah’s insistence on merging competing ideologies and cultural value systems of disparate origin is instructive of a highly dynamic perspective, a state of creolization (Uimonen, 2012). The state of creolization refers to a body politic as well as condition or position that draws on multiple cultural strands of different spatiotemporal origins in the context of asymmetric power structures. In using the term creolization, I agree with Gordon’s (2014) suggestion that it helps us engage in “universalizing thought” with “greater transcultural validity” (p. 163). Unlike multiculturalism or cultural pluralism, creolization captures the convergence of disparate cultural elements, within the context of unequal social relations and interactions. In the anthropology of globalization, creolization has been used to capture transnational interconnectedness within the political economy of center-periphery relations (Hannerz, 2006). Through an ingenious convergence of the writings of Rousseau and Fanon, Gordon (2014) advances the usefulness of the term by creolizing political theory. It would appear that Nkrumah’s conscientism offers an antecedent to such creolized political theory.

Through the lens of creolization, conscientism comes across as an astonishingly vibrant philosophy of liberation, which creatively built upon yet confidently challenged hegemonic knowledge production, not least by infusing African philosophy into European philosophy. Well versed in the works of various European philosophers, Nkrumah (1964) drew on dialectical materialism, as opposed to idealism, but insisted on the spiritual dimension of human life as per African cultural history, thus rejecting the atheism of Marxism. By cross-breeding philosophy and ideology, Nkrumah propagated socialism, as opposed to capitalism, which he in turn linked to African communalism. He argued that communalism was the “social-political ancestor” of socialism (p. 73), while capitalism constituted nothing less than a “betrayal of the personality and conscience of Africa” (p. 74). Having discarded capitalism as “the gentleman’s method of slavery” (p. 72), Nkrumah pointed to socialism for the “restitution of Africa’s humanist and egalitarian principles of society” (p. 77).

Nkrumah acknowledged the value of anthropology, while tackling its misuse by colonial power. He pointed out how colonizers had relied on “history and anthropology as an instrument of their oppressive ideology,” to the point of regarding African culture and society as “the infancy of mankind,” while “[o]ur sophisticated culture” was discarded as “simple and paralysed by inertia” (p. 62). Even so, he
was not adverse to anthropology, which he had studied himself (Ntarangwi et al., 2006). If anything, he critiqued Kant for discarding anthropology as a basis for ethics (apparently oblivious to Kant’s writings on anthropology), while asserting that the egalitarian principles of philosophical consciencism were based on the objective study of the nature of man (Nkrumah, 1964):

It is the basic unity of matter, despite its varying manifestations, which gives rise to egalitarianism. Basically, *man is one*, for all men have the same basis and arise from the same evolution according to materialism. This is the objective ground of egalitarianism. (p. 96, emphasis added)

By grounding his philosophy on the (anthropological) study of human nature, Nkrumah (1964) could merge the universal and the particular, the global (world at large) and the local (Africa), into a cosmopolitan whole of one humanity. Arguing for egalitarianism as a defining feature of human nature, Nkrumah articulated a philosophy that was “generalizable” (man is basically one) as well as in tune with “the traditional African outlook” (the grounding of cardinal principles of ethics in the nature of man) (p. 97).

When it came to difference, Nkrumah (1964) asserted that it by no means negated egalitarianism:

Egalitarianism cannot mean the absence of difference. It does not require this. It recognizes and accepts differences among men, but allows them to make a difference only at the functional level. Beyond that the differences are not allowed to make a difference, certainly not at the level of intrinsic worth of the individual. (p. 45)

I would argue that in terms of a political philosophy, consciencism offered a truly cosmopolitan appraisal of the human condition, based on substantial knowledge of and genuine interest in different cultural and political traditions. Not only was it a philosophy that could be applied to any country, thus espousing global relatedness, but it also insisted on the equality of all humankind. In short, consciencism offered a cosmopolitan vision of one world, with an emphasis on the freedom and equality of all people, sharing one humanity. Through consciencism we can rethink cosmopolitanism in terms of egalitarianism, a universalism that values cultural difference, while insisting on the equal value of all humans.

**Nkrumah’s cosmopolitan vision of African unity for world peace**

Among Pan-African icons, Nkrumah stands out for his intellectual grasp of and political struggle for African unity. Not only was Nkrumah the first president of the first Sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from colonial rule, but he was also ready to relinquish national independence for the sake of continental
unity. In his independence speech, Nkrumah famously declared: “Our independ-
ence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa.” For
Nkrumah, African unity was not empty political rhetoric; he advocated the cre-
atation of a Union of African States, a federation of free states that would assure the
strength of the continent and make a substantial contribution to world peace.

In *Africa Must Unite* (1963), Nkrumah discussed the political significance of
African unity, starting with the words *Freedom! Hedsole! Sawaha! Uhuru!*, thus
acknowledging the cultural and linguistic diversity of the African continent.
Nkrumah (1963) recapitulated common misrepresentations of African history
and the practices of “imperialist anthropologists,” whose works aimed at “proving
the inferiority of the African” (p. 1). But he also acknowledged that another
school of thought, including historians and anthropologists, was re-assessing
such evidence and looking at how “civilization dawned contemporaneously in
Africa and in China” (p. 2). Setting the historical records straight, Nkrumah
highlighted pre-colonial civilizations in Africa, while ascertaining the continent’s
long history of cultural engagements with other civilizations (e.g. Chinese, Islamic)
and the *hospitality* guiding such interactions.

In his call for African unity, Nkrumah endorsed Pan-Africanism, especially the
movement’s gradual steering towards the African continent. As much as Africa
was said to lack the “necessary ingredients for unity” (common race, culture and
language), due to the continent’s historical background, Nkrumah maintained that
Africans shared something far deeper than the colonial experience: “a sense of one-
ness in that we are *Africans*” (p. 132).

Just like Nkrumah considered African unity to be crucial to the continent’s
freedom from political and economic colonialism, he saw African unity as an
important step towards world peace. Highly critical of the two power blocs
(USA and USSR), Nkrumah was an articulate advocate of the non-aligned move-
ment, which saw the need for disarmament not only in terms of a universal desire
for peace, but also as a precondition for equitable development, since Cold War
military spending meant that vast possibilities for increased standards of living
were “now denied the people of the less-developed areas” (p. 199).

To Nkrumah, world peace hinged on the total liberation of all parts of the
world from the oppressive shackles of exploitation. Unlike Kant, he did not sug-
gest that war was the natural state of humans, instead he linked war to exploitation
and oppression:

*When we in Africa denounce imperialism and the recent off-shoot, neo-colonialism,
we do it not only because we believe that Africa belongs to the Africans and should be
governed by them, but also in the interest of world peace which is so essential to our
development and freedom. By abolishing imperialism in all its forms, the world will be
rid of many of the present areas of conflict. [...]*

*Hence it follows that, if the truest interest of all peoples is pursued, there must come
an end to all forms of exploitation and oppression of man by man, of nation by*
nation; there must come an end to war. There must result peaceful co-existence and the prosperity and happiness of all mankind. (Nkrumah, 1963, pp. 202–203).

By now it should become quite obvious that Nkrumah’s cultural horizon was based on a far more cosmopolitan ontology than Kant had reason to conjure. I recognize that by reading Nkrumah in terms of cosmopolitanism, I am using an analytical term, rather than a term of self-description. Even though Nkrumah may not have referred to himself as a cosmopolitan, and given the elitist connotations of the term he may well have deplored it, I would argue that his life trajectory as well as his life work were distinctly cosmopolitan, including his Pan-Africanism. In so doing, I agree with Doku’s (2015) observation that “Just like [W.E.B.] Du Bois, Nkrumah’s cosmopolitan enthusiasm is under-appreciated” (p. 169). Similarly, I agree that both shared a “cosmopolitan élan in their efforts to create the possibility of a just social, economic, and political global order” (p. 166). For it is precisely in their emphasis on justice and equality for all of humanity that these Pan-African icons expressed worldviews that can help us rethink cosmopolitanism:

Kwame Nkrumah had a vision not only for Africa but also the whole world. He foresaw the imminence of a unified world in which all sectors of society would have no choice but to work together. His vision and mission then was to prepare African for the task of playing a role in this approaching unified world society, not as a subordinate continent but as an equal and dignified member and partner. (Dodoo, 2012:78, emphasis added)

Nkrumah’s insistence on equal membership in a unified world society is instructive of African aspirations for membership in world society (Ferguson, 2006). Cognizant of Africa’s place-in-the-world, this perspective speaks to the political economy of inequality that continues to demarcate Africa’s rank in global hierarchies, pointing to the “patchwork of discontinuous and hierarchically ranked spaces” that constitutes our globalized world (Ferguson, 2006: 49). If anything, Nkrumah’s call for the abolishment of imperialism and neo-colonialism for the sake of world peace, and his insistence on the indivisibility of freedom for all humankind, not only highlight the relationality of Africa and Europe, but clarifies how “the south’ is a window on the world at large,” thus illustrating how social theory from the south actually “transcends the very dualism of north and south” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012: 47).

Concluding remarks: Towards decolonised (anthropology of) cosmopolitanism

“I greet you in the name of Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah!” a young man exclaimed excitedly, when addressing participants of the PAWA Continental Colloquium in Accra on 7 November 2017. Hosted in the five-star Labadi Beach Hotel, the colloquium marked the 24th International African Writers’ Day, organized by the
Pan African Writers’ Association (PAWA), established in 1989 with support of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In this literary event, Nkrumah was recognized as a writer, yet it was his call for African unity that inspired the young man to evoke the name of Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah: “I can see that Africa can unite,” adding “We are brothers of common destiny.” Prior to the PAWA event I had visited the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park, a spacious park near the ocean that hosts the Nkrumah Mausoleum, commissioned in 1992, two decades after his death. In front of the marble mausoleum, which is in the shape of a tree cut short, is a large bronze statue of Nkrumah, with his right arm raised high pointing forwards, a tribute to his party’s slogan Forward Ever. The statue was erected on the very same spot where Nkrumah made the historic proclamation for Ghana’s independence on 6 March 1957 (Milne, 2000: 268). Behind the mausoleum I spotted an earlier statue of Nkrumah, a beheaded statue with a placard explaining that it was the original statue in front of the parliament house, “attacked by a mob” and “vandalized,” “in the wake of a military with police coup d’etat on 24 February 24 1966.” In her recollection of tributes made to Nkrumah on 1 July 1992 at the commissioning of the Memorial Park, Milne (2000: 270) noted that Atukwei Okai, Secretary-General of PAWA “spoke of Nkrumah as a writer.” Twenty-five years later the same Professor Okai was still in charge of pursuing PAWA’s mission “to promote peace and understanding in Africa and the world through literature” (PAWA, 2017, emphasis added), words that resonate with some of Nkrumah’s writings discussed in this article.

Nkrumah’s lasting legacy on succeeding generations of anti-imperialists, anti-neocolonialists and Pan-Africanists has yet to be ascertained. In Ghana, Nkrumah has a mixed legacy, yet his name continues to evoke visions of African unity, while his writings on the dangers of neo-colonialism convey an uncanny applicability in today’s world. “THE neo-colonialism of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage,” Nkrumah’s words from 1965 are cited on the web site of the Nkrumah Memorial Hall, along with his “non-alignment quote,” which reads “We face neither East nor West; We face forward.”

By contrast, Kant maintains an elevated position in western philosophy, his cosmopolitan vision rarely scrutinized in relation to his racist ontology, shrouded as anthropology. Scholars of cosmopolitanism, anthropologists in particular, should be wary of this problematic genealogy, since it contradicts the essence of cosmopolitanism, ontologically and epistemologically, for reasons well beyond Kantian anthropology. At a time when xenophobic, islamophobic, racist and sexist voices are getting ever more powerful, oftentimes inspired by imperialistic nostalgia, scholars can ill afford to turn a blind eye to the lasting legacy of Enlightenment philosophers like Kant.

It appears pertinent to identify other genealogies of cosmopolitanism, so that we can arrive at a more cosmopolitan understanding of the world as a whole, by way of anthropology. I believe anthropology is well suited to this task, but it takes some serious soul searching. It is not enough to suggest a plurality of cosmopolitanisms, while leaving the racism of Kantian cosmopolitanism invisible and intact. In this
article I have probed Nkrumah’s political philosophy to identify another genealogy of cosmopolitanism, an egalitarian cosmopolitanism that views freedom and equality as preconditions for peaceful coexistence, oppression and exploitation as primary sources of human conflict, reaffirming the oneness of humankind in the sense of one world, while recognizing that cultural difference by no means negates the equal worth of all human beings. Anthropologists can hopefully add more cosmopolitan genealogies to broaden scholarly and popular understandings of the world as one.

Acknowledgements
I am grateful to Senyo Dey for urging me to read Kwame Nkrumah and for hosting me in Accra in November 2017, Lina Lorentz for generously giving me her copy of Nkrumah’s autobiography, and Professor emeritus Ulf Hannerz for lending me his first editions of Nkrumah’s books, sharing his memories and photos of Nkrumah in an OAU meeting in Accra in 1963, and for commenting an earlier version of this article. I am deeply grateful for the careful reading and constructive critique of two anonymous reviewers for the Critique of Anthropology and the journal’s expeditious handling of publication. The method of reading and the urge to probe cosmopolitanism have been inspired by my participation in the research program Cosmopolitan and Vernacular Dynamics in World Literatures (2016–2021), supported by The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences.

Declaration of conflicting interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work is Funded by The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences, Dnr: M15-0343:1.

ORCID iD
Paula Uimonen http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4228-3403

Notes
1. I have discussed the need for cross breeding of feminism and cosmopolitanism elsewhere (Uimonen, 2016).
2. It has been suggested that it was Kant’s former student and later rival Johann Herder who made a lasting impact on the development of anthropology as a discipline distinct from philosophy (Zammito, 2002).
3. In anthropology, Nkrumah is known for a painting in his office depicting him fighting off the “last chains of colonialism,” as portrayed in three characters: a capitalist, a missionary and an anthropologist carrying a book entitled African Political Systems (Johan Galtung, 1967 cited in Kuper, 1973: 123).
4. In African anthropology, Nkrumah is recognized for his genuine interest in anthropology, along with Kenyatta. Both saw the value of anthropology in “reclaiming an African identity,” even though Nkrumah was highly critical of the “abuse of the anthropological knowledge” for colonial exploitation (Ntarangwi et al., 2006: 16).

5. http://kwamenkrumahmemorialpark.ghana-net.net last accessed on 14 November 2017.

6. As Fanon ([1964] 1967) so succinctly pointed out over half a century ago: “If in England, in Belgium, or in France, despite the democratic principles affirmed by these respective nations, there are still racists, it is these racists who, in their opposition to the country as a whole, are logically consistent” (p. 40).

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**Author Biography**

Paula Uimonen is an associate professor at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University. Paula specializes in digital anthropology and anthropology of art, visual culture, media and globalization. Her current project on African women writers has a web site at http://womenwriters.one/. Paula’s recent publications focus on mobile photography in Tanzania (2016), mobile infrastructure in Africa (2015), and mourning rituals for Mandela in Cape Town (2015). Her research on digital media and intercultural interaction at a national art institute in Tanzania was published in the monograph *Digital Drama. Teaching and Learning Art and Media in Tanzania* (Uimonen, 2012), with a website at http://innovativeethnographies.net/digitaldrama. Paula has also produced documentary films, most recently *Efuru@50* (2016), see https://vimeo.com/paulauimonen.