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Pan-Africanism: A Quest for Liberation and the Pursuit of a United Africa

Mark Malisa ^{1,*} and Phillippa Nhengeze ²

¹ Department of Educational Research and Administration, University of West Florida,
11000 University Pkwy, Pensacola, FL 32514, USA

² Department of Economics, Africa University, Mutare, Zimbabwe; phillipan3@gmail.com

* Correspondence: mmalisa@uwf.edu

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Abstract: Our paper examines the place of Pan-Africanism as an educational, political, and cultural movement which had a lasting impact on the on the relationship between liberation and people of African descent, in the continent of Africa and the Diaspora. We also show its evolution, beginning with formerly enslaved Africans in the Americas, to the colonial borders of the 1884 Berlin Conference, and conclude with the independence movements in Africa. For formerly enslaved Africans, Pan-Africanism was an idea that helped them see their commonalities as victims of racism. That is, they realized that they were enslaved because they came from the same continent and shared the same racial heritage. They associated the continent of Africa with freedom. The partitioning of Africa at the Berlin Conference (colonialism) created pseudo-nation states out of what was initially seen as an undivided continent. Pan-Africanism provided an ideology for rallying Africans at home and abroad against colonialism, and the creation of colonial nation-states did not erase the idea of a united Africa. As different African nations gained political independence, they took it upon themselves to support those countries fighting for their independence. The belief, then, was that as long as one African nation was not free, the continent could not be viewed as free. The existence of nation-states did not imply the negation of Pan-Africanism. The political ideas we examine include those of Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, Maya Angelou, and Thabo Mbeki. Pan-Africanism, as it were, has shaped how many people understand the history of Africa and of African people.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism; Africa; Colonialism; Globalization; Education

1. Introduction

Our paper examines the place of Pan-Africanism as an educational, political, and cultural movement which had a lasting impact on the liberation of people of African descent, in the continent of Africa and the Diaspora (Ayttey 2010; West 2005; Clarke 2012; Fergus 2010; Armah 2010). We also show its evolution, beginning with formerly enslaved Africans in the Americas, to the colonial borders of the 1884 Berlin Conference, the rise of the independence movements in Africa (1957–1975), and the present. Within the discourse of genealogy, we argue that Pan Africanism should be understood as a quest for Africa’s self-understanding and self-knowledge through historical narrative.

In giving a somewhat chronological development of Pan Africanism, we acknowledge how genealogy is also a narration about a people’s history and origins. Even in oral cultures, griots preserved a people’s history through story-telling, or biographical narratives (Schulz 1997). Schulz also noted that it was not uncommon for griots to recast historical narratives so that “the current situation is presented as the outcome of a never specified past” (Schulz 1997, p. 446). While griots were at times

beholden to the court, ultimately, the best ones owed allegiance to truth and justice, resisting the lure of power and material rewards (Armah 2000; Hale 1994; Haley 2002).

It is also important to note that the narration of history, even in oral cultures, was shared by both men and women (Hale 1994). Irvine (1978) contended that genealogy should be considered as part of history, and in the making of history, women play an important role, especially within the Pan African Movement. Readers familiar with *Roots* will likely be aware of the role of griots in recounting a people's history, their genealogy, of how they came to be in the present condition. Genealogies generally end with an examination of the present condition, based on a remembrance of the past and a future that is yet to be born (Fall 2003; Armah 2000; Williams 1992).

Within the context of this paper, Pan Africanism refers to a philosophy (or philosophies) which sought to promote ideas of a united Africa. Over different historical periods, the philosophies evolved, but the focus on the unity or oneness of Africa stayed consistent. Partly because some of the evolution of Pan Africanism took place in universities, we also examine Pan Africanism's development as an intellectual movement tied to the aspirations of people of African descent in different parts of the world. In addition to being a philosophical and intellectual movement, Pan Africanism is also a political movement or organization whose goal was the liberation and unity of Africa, especially after slavery and the encounter with modernity (Armah 1973, 2000, 2008, 2010). We also use Black and African interchangeably, for that is how the concept operated within Pan Africanism.

For formerly enslaved Africans, Pan-Africanism was an idea that helped them see their commonalities as victims of racism (Fergus 2010). That is, they realized that they were enslaved because they came from the same continent and shared the same racial heritage. Needless to say, the early articulations and manifestations of Pan Africanism took place outside Africa, mainly in North America and the Caribbean. Pan Africanists associated the continent of Africa with freedom. The partitioning of Africa at the Berlin Conference (colonialism) created pseudo-nation-states out of what was initially seen as an undivided continent (Armah 2010; Wa Thiongo 2009). Pan-Africanism provided an ideology for rallying Africans at home and abroad against colonialism, and the creation of colonial nation-states did not erase the idea of a united Africa.

As different African nations gained political independence, they took it upon themselves to support those countries fighting for their independence. Many African countries drew inspiration from the nations in the Caribbean, including Cuba (Martin 2011). The belief, then, was that, as long as one African nation was not free, the continent could not be viewed as free. The existence of nation-states did not imply the negation of Pan-Africanism. The political ideas examined include those of Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, and Thabo Mbeki. Pan-Africanism, as it were, has shaped how many people understand the history of Africa and of African people.

Pan Africanism, as it were, offered a hope that Africa will be one, united, not balkanized by colonial powers (Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie 2010). It made it possible to give a systematic presentation of a united Africa, an attempt at self-definition. Many scholars were cognizant of the fact that the history of Africa did not begin with the encounter with Europeans or foreign invaders, even though the encounter with Europeans had led to the fall of Africa (Williams 1992; Armah 2010; Emerson 1962). African kingdoms and empires existed (Emerson 1962). Its spirit predated the first Pan-African Congress meeting of 1900 in London (Clarke 2012) and there was an implicit understanding that, prior to the encounter with modernity, Africa was united.

Throughout generations, Pan Africanism promoted a consciousness of Africa as the ancestral home for Black people, and a desire to work for its liberation (Gebrekidan 2012). At the core was the understanding that people of African heritage had similar experiences, regardless of their location in the world. Among such experiences included colonialism, racial oppression, and slavery (Padmore 1956; Malcolm 1992). For a significant part of the 20th Century, Addis Ababa was frequently viewed as headquarters of the Organization of African Unity, indicative of the hope of a united Africa. However,

even before first the Pan-African Congress in London, Blacks had envisioned the formation of a United States of Africa ([Gebrekidan 2012](#)).

2. Days of Slavery and After

Although the word Pan-Africanism came into popular use in the 1950s, there are some who argue that the philosophy of Pan Africanism was present and manifested itself not only in the protests and resistance to slavery, but the desire to return to Africa ([Geiss 1967](#); [Armah 2010](#)). Formerly enslaved Africans sought to return to Africa, and even when a physical return was impossible they kept the idea of Africa alive ([Du Bois 1973, 1992, 1995](#); [Padmore 1956](#)). In many ways, enslavement did not remove sense of longing or belonging to a wider African community, or even a return to Africa ([Lake 1995](#); [Tsomondo 1975](#); [Padmore 1956](#); [Armah 2010](#)).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, there were many efforts to repatriate formerly enslaved Africans ([Blyden 1967, 1996](#)), and some left from the USA to Sierra Leone and Liberia. While some returned on a voluntary basis, others did so at the urging of European Americans with the support of the US government ([Lake 1995](#); [Liebenow 1973](#)). While abolitionists in the United States were keen to end slavery, some were not enamored of having Blacks live among them, and encouraged them to relocate to Africa. Some were shipped from Jamaica and the Caribbean to make it free and safe for Europeans ([Walker 1976](#)).

Many of the formerly enslaved Africans returning to Africa saw their mission as that of advancing Africa through means similar to what was happening in North America and Europe. Among the new things they sought included new forms of commerce and new religions, including Christianity ([West 2005](#)). For [Crummell \(1996\)](#), it was a fusion of capitalism and Christianity, or Anglophilia that could lead to a transformation of Africa.

The return to Africa, or the promise and premise of Pan Africanism was predicated on a vision of a triumphant or victorious Africa, one free of slavery and foreign domination. However, the appearances of the abolition of slavery did not lead to a significant emancipation of Africans, in the Diaspora or in Africa itself. The abolition of slavery was followed by the “dismemberment of Africa at the 1885 Berlin Conference, a process much like the butchering of a huge elephant for sharing among jubilant hunter kin” ([Armah 2010](#), p. 15). The Berlin Conference and the subsequent partitioning of Africa laid the foundation for the colonization of Africa. To a great extent, in the Berlin Conference “European society found the principle of resource theft perfectly acceptable, indeed, inevitable . . . formalized this acceptance of brutality as good governance for Africa” ([Armah 2010](#), p. 15). Africa and Africans belonged to Europeans, and Germany played a central role in the partitioning of Africa.

2.1. The Berlin Conference

The partitioning of Africa at the Berlin Conference not only led to the theft of resources, but to the creation of borders where previously there had been none, and the making of pseudo-states administered by Europeans using European legal systems. According to Ngugi Wa Thiongo, the “Berlin Conference of 1884 literally fragmented and reconstituted Africa into British, French, Portuguese, German, Belgian, and Spanish Africa” ([Wa Thiongo 2009](#), p. 3). Political, cultural, and economic independence were lost in the process of colonialism. However, instead of a vacuum, Europe used the colonial experience to impose its cultural memory in ways that would radically alter the course of African history and identity, as well as the potential unification of Africa. With the partitioning of Africa, what had been previously one whole, suddenly became a landmass of several nation states.

As a result of the Berlin Conference, Germany had German West Africa (Namibia) and German East Africa (Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi) as well as Togo and Cameroon. France, on the other hand, took possession of over ten territories, including the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Niger, Gambia, Morocco, Gabon, Algeria and Tunisia. To Britain went Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Egypt, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Botswana, Lesotho, and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) among others.

Even Portugal colonized Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau ([Chamberlain 1999](#)). Delegates from 14 European countries convened and decided the fate of Africa and its people.

The masquerade of European rationality and the superiority of the European political system lasted until the emergence of Hitler and his rise to power and subsequent Nazism. Nazism revealed the shortcomings or moral bankruptcy of European philosophies and ideologies, especially with regard to the Holocaust ([Armah 2010](#); [Adorno 2005](#)). Following the defeat of Germany, other European countries punished Germany by dispossessing it of its African colonies. Colonies that had formerly belonged to Germany were given as spoils to new conquerors.

In addition to dividing Africa among themselves, European nations also divided Africans from each other. This was mostly evident with the making of colonial borders. However, the colonial borders also quickly became religious and cultural borders, as colonialism was quickly followed by the imposition of different religious traditions, including variations of Christianity ([Armah 2010](#); [Wa Thiongo 2009](#)). A byproduct of the division of Africa was the creation in the European imaginary, culture, and scholarship, of Egypt and parts of North Africa as separate from the rest of Africa, especially what is now called Africa South of the Sahara ([Armah 2010](#); [Bentahar 2011](#)). European cartography defined Africa's geographical and political identity. The Berlin Conference, in many ways, created pseudo-nation states beholden to colonial powers ([Emerson 1962](#)). It formed the foundation for the continued destruction of African history, culture, and unity.

However, even from Europe and North America, as well as the Caribbean, people of African descent strove for maintaining the unity of Africa. Among the many platforms through which this was done included the Pan African Congresses.

2.2. Pan African Congresses

Notwithstanding the concerted effort by Europeans at disuniting Africa as a result of the Berlin Conference, leading activists and intellectuals in the Diaspora sought ways for advocating for the unity of Africa and people of African descent. Those in the Diaspora organized conferences and congresses to deliberate on the present and future of Africa ([Mboukou 1983](#); [Lake 1995](#)). Pan Africanism can be understood as a practical and philosophical approach to a unity of people of African heritage, especially those in North America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. The Pan African Congresses, especially those during the time of Du Bois and Padmore, became places for defining the goals and vision for Africa ([Geiss 1967](#)).

The First Pan African Congress was held in London in 1900 ([Lake 1995](#)). It was organized by Williams of Trinidad and explored, among other things, the independence of Africa, and the rights of Black people in the Diaspora. In many ways, Pan Africanism made it possible to view the future of Africa through a different lens. A generational and ideological shift was apparent, especially when compared with those of the days immediately after slavery. Christianity was no longer viewed as essential to the ideological and material revival of Africa ([West 2005](#)).

The Second Pan African Congress took place in 1919, and was again overwhelmingly dominated by Blacks from the Diaspora. As with the First Congress, it also took place in Europe, and among those present included W.E.B. Du Bois ([Mboukou 1983](#)). Du Bois played a leading role in many of the Pan African Congresses ([Gibrill 2014](#)); what eventually came into play was the question of who was to lead Africa out of European domination, and in what political and ideological direction.

During this period, Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois played a leading role in shaping the direction or path toward the future of Africa. For Garvey, it was important for Africans to think in terms of race first ([Martin 1986](#)), and in this case, the Black race. Du Bois had already written and published on the contributions of Black people in world history in ways that challenged European perceptions and depictions of Africa ([Du Bois 1986](#)). The fissures in European ideologies and capitalism had made it possible for Blacks in the Diaspora to study Marxism and Socialism. The rise of the Soviet Union, and the acceptance of Blacks in the Communist International persuaded Pan Africanists to explore Socialism as central to the unification and future of Africa ([Padmore 1956](#); [Solomon 1998](#)).

However, within a relatively short time, some Pan Africanists began to realize the shortcomings of socialism, and broke with the Communist International (Mboukou 1983; Campbell 1995). At the early stages of his career, the younger Padmore, for example, viewed socialism and the potential solidarity between workers of the world as something that could solve the race problem. In other words, for a while he saw the problem as one of economics, while Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and others viewed race as central. By 1933, however, Padmore began to see the limitations of Communism within the struggle for African freedom. He had a huge influence on other Pan Africanists, including Kwame Nkrumah (Murapa 1972).

Most students of Pan Africanism would rarely question the dedication that those in the Diaspora had for the cause of Africa. Partly because of the proximity to Europeans as well as their experiences with European and North American education, those assembled at the First and Second Pan African Congresses envisaged themselves playing a leadership role in Africa. Even younger Du Bois saw the educated Blacks as essential to a mission of civilizing Africa (Issacs 1960). For a significant amount of time, the early Pan Africanists saw the liberation of Africa through an Anglo-American worldview, but this is partly because they had been educated in that environment. It could be argued that “they sought to remake Africa and Africans, at home and abroad, in the image of the emerging bourgeois North Atlantic societies” (West 2005, p. 88). However, over time, many of the Pan Africanists found a home in Africa, and ended up advising the presidents of newly independent African countries.

By the time of the Fifth Pan African Congress (held in 1945), the hope that the Anglo American model could provide a transformative and emancipatory framework for Africa was being slowly abandoned. While previous congresses had advocated for a gradual emancipation for Africans, the Fifth Pan African Congress stressed the necessity of ending colonialism (Padmore 1956). The ideological and political rationale for gaining political independence had been laid, and representatives from African countries began actively participating in congresses.

With the advent and consolidation of political independence in Africa, the subsequent Pan African Congresses were held in Africa, shifting the balance to Africa. The creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) technically made many African heads of State ambassadors to/of Pan Africanism. It was within this framework that Nkrumah made Ghana’s resources available to African countries fighting for political independence (Ahlmán 2010, 2011). When the OAU met in 1964, Malcolm X used the opportunity to make explicit the global dilemma faced by Black people.

3. Political and Cultural Liberation

Some African states gained political independence through peaceful transitions of power, when former colonial masters handed over power to Africans. Ghana was the first in 1957, and South Africa was the last in 1994. Peaceful transition was not the norm, however, and many countries had to wage armed struggle to attain political freedom.

Blacks from the Caribbean and Diaspora visited and worked in newly independent countries. They also supported the Mau Mau of Kenya, the ANC in South Africa, and the struggle for Namibia’s independence. Although independence was generally attained one state at a time, the states that gained political independence provided resources for liberation movements from other African countries. The liberation of Africa was seen as incomplete without each and every country being free (Nkrumah 1963).

Perhaps the apex of the connection among the struggle for liberation by Blacks worldwide was during the wars for political independence in Africa and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. To a great extent, the two informed each other, as evidenced by the speeches of Malcolm (1989, 1992, 1999) and Nelson Mandela (Mandela 1995). Torn between capitalism and socialism/Marxism, Malcolm X opined that there was another way—the African way. His travels to Africa, and his visits to Ghana, Tanzania, and Egypt, among other countries, helped him see that there were alternatives to European and North American ideologies (Mbuguni 2014).

At the dawn of independence, there was a general impression that adopting western forms of governing or government is a sign of being civilized or of being progressive. Consequently, there persisted an illusion that *true democracy* implied the traditions and trappings that go with western rituals of power, and that in the desire for freedom Africans had to adopt European ways of being. Malcolm X was quick to point out that there could be a variety of forms of being and of governing for those who chose to. As such, he pointed out that those African countries which were fighting for independence did not want to be Europeanized:

But the Africans themselves want to be themselves They want to take out of any other philosophy that which they can adopt for their own needs and to their own development. But to be identified with either the Communist bloc or the capitalist bloc, I don't think you will find any African country or African leader who will buy that-he's for Africa. (Malcolm 1989, p. 100)

For Black people worldwide, Malcolm X saw cultural renewal and reconnection with Africa as central to regaining a sense of humanity. He was aware that "history is a people's memory, and without a memory man is demoted to the level of lower animals" (Malcolm 1992, p. 55). His quest for his own history and roots took him first to Elijah Muhammad. While the teaching of Elijah Muhammad gave him a distorted version of the origins of humankind, it also took him on to the path which led him to study aspects of African and Middle East history. It was during this quest that Malcolm X realized there was more to Black history than most African Americans knew. He was also aware of the role of the educational system in hiding or eradicating nonwestern history:

It is no accident that such a high state of culture existed in Africa and you and I know nothing about it. Why, the man knew that as long as you and I thought we were somebody he could never treat us like we were nobody. So he had to invent a system that would strip us of everything about us that we could use to prove we were somebody. And once he had stripped us of all human characteristics, stripped us of our language, stripped us of our history, stripped us of all our cultural knowledge, and brought us to the level of animals, he then began to treat us like an animal, selling us from one plantation to another, selling us from one owner to another, breeding us like you breed cattle. (Malcolm 1992, p. 54)

Without a historical memory to fall back on, Blacks were vulnerable to ideological manipulation as well as a lack of confidence in their self-worth (Wa Thiongo 2009; Armah 2010). As such, African Americans (and the rest of the world) were not educated or taught enough about their own roots, without which the struggle for human dignity lay in the impossible route of cultural assimilation. What surprised Malcolm X was the lack of knowledge about Africa in general, and among African Americans in particular: "the average black person in the United States knows nothing about ancient Egyptian civilization on the African continentOr the ancient civilizations of Mali on the African continent. Civilizations that were highly developed and produced scientists" (Malcolm 1989, p. 37).

While the lack of knowledge might be puzzling in itself, it became a way for the western episteme to consolidate itself while simultaneously dislodging any positive attributes that could be associated with the non-western knowledge systems and ways of being, or to erase African history (Wa Thiongo 2009; Armah 2010). In the process of eradicating nonwestern ways of knowing, Europeans also contributed to non-Europeans hating themselves and their origins. Malcolm (1989) observed that this form of mental colonization had very damaging and long-lasting effects, particularly on African Americans. Malcolm X contended that the image that Europeans "created of our motherland and the image that you created of our people on that continent was a trap, was a prison, was a chain, was the worst form of slavery that has ever been invented by a so-called civilized race and a civilized nation since the beginning of time" (p. 167). Such cultural practices often received the blessings of the nation or many philanthropists who were keen to spread *civilization* to those under the cloud of darkness. For a long period, civilization was synonymous with adopting European ways.

In as much as Malcolm X strove to promote Pan Africanism, he was particularly concerned about the rebirth, as it were, of the spirit and culture of African Americans and connecting it to Africa. Cognizant of the impact of racism and slavery on the black psyche, he strove to conscientize African-Americans about their own history and humanity. Without such awareness raising, Malcolm X was convinced they were doomed to be perpetually beholden to their masters for liberation:

When the black man in this country awakens, becomes intellectually mature and able to think for himself, you will then see that the only way he will become independent and recognized as a human being is on the basis of equality with all other human beings. He has to have what they have and he has to be doing for himself what others are doing for themselves, so the first step is to awaken him to this and that is where the religion of Islam makes him morally more able to rise above the evils and the vices of an immoral society. And the political, economic, and social philosophy of black nationalism instills within him the racial dignity and the incentive and the confidence that he needs to stand on his own feet and take a stand for himself. (Malcolm 1992, p. 38)

Psychological and cultural regeneration, grounded on Pan Africanism, were an essential component to the path to self-discovery and participation as equals in the global human family.

Malcolm (1992) was convinced that Blacks “armed with the knowledge of [our] past, [we] can with confidence charter a course for our future. Culture is an integral weapon in the freedom struggle” (p. 56). Learning African culture became an important tool and strategy for recreating and strengthening Pan Africanism. He was also aware that, while Africans were embracing Islam and other indigenous religions, there were alternatives to European civilization that had stood the test of time. To unshackle the bonds of mental slavery necessitated a cultural education closely linked to developments outside the United States. Dunayevskaya (1982) credited Malcolm X with transforming and infusing into blackness a revolutionary consciousness as well as universalizing the nature of the revolution against white supremacy. What Malcolm X accomplished in his theorizing about the non-Western world amounts to what Asante (1999) saw the placing of different philosophies as sources for creating a better and different world.

Asante (1990, 1999) credited Malcolm X with grounding his conception of the life and history in an Afrocentric worldview, or the ability and willingness to see the world through Pan Africanism. By so doing, Malcolm X stands on the shoulders of other Pan-Africanists, including Du Bois (1986, 1992, 1995) who had critiqued and rejected the view that Western ways of knowing were the only ones that were legitimate. Similar to Du Bois, Malcolm X sought cultural regeneration or the quest of better and meaningful humanity by looking at the world through Pan Africanism. Monteiro (2000) saw in the work Du Bois one of the first intellectuals to interrogate the problems of race and capitalism from an African perspective, while Smallwood (2005) contended that Malcolm X could be seen as one of the progenitors of the Black Studies disciplines, particularly with regards to his call for reevaluating the curriculum so that it reflected the achievements of blacks. While there are undoubtedly many similarities between the work of Malcolm X and W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X was radical in the ways he saw and attributed the transformative role to the whole community rather than the talented tenth in which Du Bois saw the hope for the regeneration of the race.

A few scholars, among them Lefkowitz (1996) and Walker (1991), question the legitimacy of Afrocentrism and the Afrocentric worldview in general, and contend that it is based on myths. While Malcolm (1989, 1992, 1999) and Du Bois (1995) based their affirmation of the validity of the epistemology of the Black world on empirical and ethnographical studies and encounters, Lefkowitz and Walker did not offer much justification for their denial other than an incredulity that the nonwestern world could offer a civilization that could challenge the status held by the West. Indeed, they seem to be unaware of the work of W.E.B. Du Bois. Indeed, while they are quick to associate Afrocentrism with myth-making, neither questions the ideological and fictional narratives that construct European and American histories.

Malcolm X was aware that black “history and our culture were completely destroyed when we were forcibly brought to America in chains. And now it is important for us to know that our history did not begin with slavery” (Malcolm 1992, p. 53). Most of those who rejected Afrocentrism were also unwilling to accept that there is more to Black history than the encounter with modernity, or that Blacks could aspire to be anything more than former slaves or former colonials who have to depend on their former slave masters and colonizers for constructing a viable future for Africa. In addition to promoting and advocating for Pan Africanism in different platforms, Malcolm X and others of his generation used universities as a place for deliberating on the potential of Pan Africanism to radically alter the condition of Blacks worldwide. Universities, in many ways, played a role in shaping and preserving the idea of the unity or oneness of Africa.

Women and Pan Africanism

The vast amount of literature on Pan Africanism gives the impression that it was a male-dominated initiative, with women being invisible, or playing marginal roles. However, a closer reading of the events and activities associated with the Pan African Movement shows that women played a pivotal role in its history as well as the ideological directions it followed. Roy-Campbell (1996) observed that, for the most part, the first Five Congresses could be described as male-centered. The women whose presence was acknowledged include Shirley Du Bois, Amy Garvey, Mary McLeod Bethune and Annie Cooper.

In reading Pan-Africanism through a western patriarchal eye, it is possible to not see the presence of women or the leadership roles they played in Pan-Africanism. However, the 1927 Pan African Congress held in New York witnessed a significant presence of Black women, other than just those who were wives of the leading men. The Sixth and Seventh Pan African Congresses devoted a significant amount of their proceedings to addressing the concerns of Black women.

It would be a mistake to view the issues facing African women as radically distinct from those that confronted African men, whether in the global north or the global south. Women in the Diaspora as well as those in the motherland were cognizant of this. In protesting the assassination of Lumumba, women from different countries, including the United States, saw in the assassination a reminder of the lynching of African men. As Morrison observed, “from a woman’s point of view, in terms of confronting the problems where the world is now, black women had to deal with post-modern problems . . . certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability” (Morrison, as cited in Gilroy 1993, p. 178).

The quote from Morrison above illustrates the ways African women were involved in the fight for a qualitatively better world, not just within a specific geographical location. In the period after 1945, and especially during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, a unique consciousness manifested itself in the lives and work of Black women: it was “a time of giving birth and of getting born into a wider concept of ourselves . . . and into a heightened sense of art and the Struggle as inseparable bedmates” (Davis and Dee 1998, p. 202).

Among the issues addressed at the Sixth and Seventh Pan African Congresses included the survival of Black or African women and children; women and the environment; and women and the law (Roy-Campbell 1996). Cognizant of the prevalence of war and conflict, there were initiatives to strengthen a Pan African Women’s Liberation Movement. Women not only played active roles in the Congresses, but their lifestyles showed commitment to Pan Africanism, and often they relocated (even if temporarily) to Africa. Black women were involved in trying to change the world.

Maya Angelou is among the women who moved to Africa (Ghana) partly as a result of her commitment to Pan Africanism, and partly because at that time she was married to an anti-apartheid activist (Angelou 1986, 2009). For Angelou, Africa and African culture were central to the liberation of Black people worldwide. Black people had to feel a sense of belonging to, of identifying with Africa. Women, to a great extent, became the mothers of the revolution, of the struggle for the liberation of Africa and its people. The conditions of Black people in one part of the world could not be seen

as different from other parts of the world, for there was a kinship by virtue of racial experiences (Smithers 2011). In many ways, Africa gave Blacks from the diaspora a sense of home, belonging, and family. However, being at home in Africa did not erase the memories slavery and racism in the United States.

For women, the return to Africa was not without challenges. Reflecting on her experiences in Ghana, Angelou observed “I doubted if I or any black from the diaspora, could really return to Africa. We wore skeletons of old despair like necklaces, heralding our arrival, and we were branded with cynicism” (Angelou 1986, p. 84). The point here is that arrival in Africa did not mean an end to the everyday challenges, but it helped with the awareness of the global significance of Pan Africanism. When Malcolm X met with Maya Angelou in Ghana, he was able to persuade her to return to the United States to continue to work for the liberation of Black people. Her experiences in Ghana gave her a taste of living in a place where racism was not the norm, where Blacks were not subjected to violence (Nehl 2016). Independent Africa, as it were, offered hope for the rebirth of humanity, or the rebirth and healing of those who had been subjected to violence and racism, especially in the global north (Smith 2008).

Campbell (1996) observed that African women played an important role in the liberation movements in Africa, and as such, should neither be marginalized nor silenced. Women, according to Campbell, were at the heart of Pan Africanism’s self-understanding and definition and independence (cultural, economic, and political). It is primarily through the work of African women, particularly those able to resist the seductive lure of crass materialism, that Africa can be redeemed (Armah 2008, 2010).

4. Universities, Education, and Pan Africanism

Universities, in and outside Africa, played a leading role in the development of Pan Africanism, especially in the 20th Century. After the abolition of slavery in the Americas, some universities began admitting Black students, as well as students from Africa. However, it was not until the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 that universities in the United States reluctantly admitted Black students (Hendrickson 2003; Doyle 2001; Meredith 1966). In some cases, the admission of Black students led to riots and protests, and prevailed only at the intervention of the federal government (Meredith 1966).

Granted the limited places for Black students in predominantly White universities, there emerged a number of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and it was in these universities that Blacks from different parts of the world (Africa, North America, and the Caribbean) met and exchanged ideas. Parker (2009) argued that universities in the United States played an important role in the struggle against colonialism in Africa. Such universities included Howard and Lincoln.

It was at Lincoln University that Nkrumah would encounter other Africans from colonized nations. It was also while at Lincoln that he gained a better and deeper understanding of the conditions facing African Americans, or Blacks in the United States. Likewise, it was at Lincoln that Azikwe got introduced to Pan Africanism, especially after meeting Padmore (Azikwe 1970). While the students might have come from different colonies in Africa, a “contemporary visitor to Tuskegee noted that “now these men have an African consciousness; their loyalty is not Liberian or Rhodesian or Gold-Coastan, but African” (Parker 2009, p. 730). Universities were an ideal ground for nurturing Pan-Africanism (Franklin 2011; Asante 2010; Fenderson 2010).

In a similar manner, universities and other institutions of learning in Africa played a significant role in developing a Pan African consciousness among students. Mandela (Mandela 1995) argued that schools were among the few places that people from different tribes met on equal footing and formed friendships that otherwise might not have been. Some of his earliest contacts as well as his knowledge of the ANC were within the context of high school and college education. The interactions with students from other tribes also made it easier for students to learn other African languages. Mandela also traced the genesis of his pan-African identity to his experiences at both high school and college. On some

occasions, missionaries sent students to evangelize in the villages, and during these expeditions students not only discussed politics: they also formed friendships across denominational lines.

During apartheid, there were very few post-secondary institutions for Africans. The most famous, according to Mandela ([Mandela 1995](#)), was Fort Hare. Even though blacks were segregated, they saw Fort Hare as the best university where they could obtain the best education in Southern Africa. According to Mandela:

The University College of Fort Hare . . . was the only residential center of higher education for blacks in South Africa. Fort Hare was more than that: it was a beacon for African scholars from over Southern Central and Eastern Africa. For young black South Africans like myself, it was Oxford and Cambridge, Harvard and Yale, all rolled into one. (p. 43)

The courses offered when Mandela was a student at Fort Hare included anthropology, Roman Dutch Law, English, politics, and Native Administration. Partly because of its academic excellence as well as the international students, Fort Hare was arguably the premier university for incubating and nurturing African revolutionary consciousness under apartheid conditions. Mandela's classmates included Oliver Tambo and Z. Matthews, both of whom held posts in the African National Congress. Fort Hare also counted Steve Biko, Robert Mugabe, Seretse Khama, Julius Nyerere, Desmond Tutu, Joshua Nkomo, and Govan Mbeki among its alumni ([Malisa 2010](#)). In the process of segregating Blacks, apartheid inadvertently made it possible for Pan Africanism to take root. Many of its alumni became staunch opponents of apartheid within and outside South Africa. Mugabe, Nyerere, and Khama later became heads of state with varying degrees of success and failure as disciples of Pan Africanism. It was also within the context of university education that Steve Biko became active in, and later led the Black Consciousness Movement which was credited with affirming the humanity of blacks in the face of the dehumanizing onslaught of apartheid. Although universities generally propagated a Eurocentric worldview, there was a growing awareness of the ways institutions of learning had participated in the deliberate falsification of knowledge about Africa and Africans ([Wilson 1993](#); [Shockley and Frederick 2010](#); [Asante 1999](#); [Andrews 2014](#)).

Access to formal Western education, however, did not yield the desired effect with regard to Pan Africanism. The Africans who were educated in Europe and North America were incapable of transforming the African condition or of solving African problems and realities ([Armah 1973, 2008](#)). Such Africans, with the backing of Europe and North America, were "completely integrated into the status quo that they could not think of designing, much less of operating, and alternative system" ([Armah 2010](#), p. 17). Even Nelson Mandela, educated at Fort Hare in South Africa, was cognizant of the ways that education had not prepared him to solve South African problems ([Mandela 1995](#)). It remains difficult to envision that an Anglo-American education, or those educated in that tradition, will be in a position to solve the issues facing Africa. Unprepared and unwilling to imagine a way of life independent of North America and Europe, their function is "invariably the deepening of African poverty in the interests of European prosperity" ([Armah 2010](#), p. 19).

5. Towards an African Renaissance: Not yet Uhuru

At the beginning of the 21st Century, there was some optimism about the present and future of Africa, especially in the idea of the African Renaissance as articulated by former South African President, Thabo Mbeki ([Ajulu 2001](#); [Mulemfo 2000](#); [Mbeki 1999](#)). The abolition of apartheid and the insertion of the philosophy of Ubuntu in African and global discourse gave the impression that the revolution had been accomplished and Africa was free at last ([Malisa 2010](#); [Ajulu 2001](#)). As a philosophy, Ubuntu placed importance on the humanity of Africans, a humanity that had been rejected by modernity. The rebirth of Africa was about to begin, and for a while, the fading ambers of Pan Africanism were rekindled.

Although Ubuntu is largely associated with the work of Bishop Desmond Tutu (1999) and Nelson Mandela with regard to the Truth and Reconciliation Process in post-apartheid South Africa, it was also

viewed as offering Africa opportunities for a continent free of conflict and civil strife. However, in addition to cultural and political reconciliation, there is an economic dimension and economic justice in the philosophy and practice of Ubuntu. The hope, then, was that, with the ascension to power by the African National Congress, there would be a redistribution of wealth and resources, a movement toward eradicating poverty. Instead, it quickly became apparent that those who became rulers “easily conceive of power in personal, not social terms; that they are happy to be individually rich in a poor society” (Armah 2010, p. 26). Even the much anticipated abolition of apartheid or the creation of the “Rainbow Nation” had not made conditions better for South African Blacks. The continued existence of economic apartheid showed the extent to which the Rainbow Nation is built on the invisibility of Blacks and Blackness, or their marginalization the failures of interracial harmony without economic justice and resource redistribution.

The idea of an African Renaissance was borne of the realization that even with political independence, Africa continued to be exploited by Europe and North America. In other words, the legacy of the Berlin Conference could still be felt across Africa. The colonizing countries had left Africa, but in such a way that Africa had to export its raw materials while being marginalized (Ajulu 2001; Rodney 1972). Although tethered to the global market and economy, Africa was seen as marginal. This was in spite of the fact that her mineral resources were fueling the industrial development of Europe and North America, among other countries.

The African Renaissance also came from the realization that political freedom in Africa had not brought about economic independence, and this was evident in the international debt burden carried by Africa (Ajulu 2001). The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank dictated the value of different currencies in Africa in ways that favored the Global North. At surface reading, logic would lead one to conclude that, through hard work and industrialization, Africa and Africans will be free. However, working under neocolonial conditions will not likely lead to a radical transformation of Africa. In his diagnosis of such work, Armah observed: “the African miner’s work is to assist the invading Western pirate in the violation of his motherland. This makes the African miner at best a zombie, at worst a culpable accomplice” (Armah 2010, p. 116).

What is unique about the African Renaissance as articulated in the work of Thabo Mbeki is the way it emphasizes the importance of grounding everyday practices (including science) in African realities and philosophies. It acknowledges the inability of modernity to work for the good of all Africans, as evidenced by Africa’s continued subjugation (Armah 1973, 2010). Neither Capitalism nor Marxism, or their derivatives, had brought freedom or unity to Africa. To a great extent, the invitation to participate in the African Renaissance is also a call for Africa’s regeneration through its languages and philosophies (Wa Thiongo 2009; Armah 2010).

It is possible to argue that the African Renaissance comes from the realization that the dreams and promises of Pan-Africanism have not yet been fulfilled, that the logic and model of capitalist development has faltered. The rapid growth of urban areas has often resulted in crumbling cities, slums, and homelessness (Malisa et al.). Cities and universities that once produced a spirit of Pan Africanism now nurture alienation. In addition, there is a growing disconnect among political refugees from Africa, whether in Africa or in the Diaspora (Chude-Sokei 2014). The relationship among Africans, globally, is no longer what it was envisioned to be. In the 21st Century, there is a significant number of educated African immigrants in the United States and Europe, and sometimes statistics indicate that African immigrants rank among the most educated in the United States (McCabe 2011; Moore 2013). However, “in the context of the new African migrations, particularly to the United States, there is no evidence whatsoever of a Pan-African movement ideology or even sensibility attempting to unite them” (Chude-Sokei 2014, p. 58). The abundance of information in the age of globalization and the opportunities to network have not led to meaningful solidarity.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have presented Pan Africanism as a philosophy or a way of life for Africans, as defined mainly by people of African descent worldwide (Clarke 2012). In many ways, it provided a structure that enabled Africans to organize their world, and to work toward a world in which their humanity would be affirmed.

Within the narrative, language or discourse of genealogy, Pan Africanism has to be understood as a search for knowledge and truth about Africa, about what Africa is, and a future that can be created (Nkrumah 1963; Njemanze and Njemanze 2011). Emerging as it did in the aftermath of slavery and colonialism, it drew attention to the ways in which the encounter with modernity led to the total colonization of Africans, including in the spheres of culture, economics, religion, and politics. Even though it rose as a response to modernity, Pan Africanism was and is a call for the self-preservation of people of African descent and a reunification of Africa (Young 2010; Mbeki 1999; Nantambu 1998; Mulemfo 2000).

That a history of Pan Africanism begins with the encounter with modernity should not be taken to imply that African history and identity did not exist prior to slavery and colonialism. Instead, the encounter destroyed and led to the disintegration of Africa (Armah 2010). While early Pan Africanists initially thought the future of Africa lay in embracing capitalism, Christianity, or even Marxism, at the birth of the 21st Century, particularly with the call for an African Renaissance, there was an implicit and explicit acknowledgement that the tools and structures of modernity had not been able to radically alter the conditions of Africans for the better.

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