

Pan Africanism and the Road to an African Renaissance

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Envision a billion begging palms turning into a billion rising fists. This is the symbol of Pan Africans as they celebrate the unification of their land. It is the proclamation of the rebirth of a silent continent after many centuries of slavery, colonialism, and economic instability. Pan Africanism has set in motion the renaissance of the African continent as a whole by challenging the status quo of colonial traditions. Its social, economic and political models are the driving forces for this change.

In the past centuries the African continent has suffered from the historical obstructions that were once set by colonizers and prevented it from developing on its own. As colonization and its systems seized Africa, the invaders established colonial land divisions that shaped the way the continent has functioned since then. It was mainly the European takeovers of the late 19th century what imposed dividing colonial boundaries through African communities that separated families and tribes like the Masai people amidst former Kenya and Tanzania. Africa has therefore stood still under the imposed path of alien countries; “Torn away from his past, propelled into a universe fashioned from outside that suppresses his values, and dumbfounded by a cultural invasion that marginalizes him, the African, is today the deformed image of others”.¹ This marginalization after the continent’s independence let the African society rot under social, economic and political insecurities and created the so called ‘scramble for Africa’. Social underdevelopment after independence rose as the product of an alteration of the social structure, a loss of life skills and an elimination of the original African culture. Without the colonizers to control the setting, Africans were both incapable of successfully proceeding with the modern model and incapable of recovering the

¹ Kodjo, Edem. Africa Tomorrow. New York: Continuum, 1987. <http://www.pambazuka.org/global-south/effects-colonialism-africas-past-and-present>.

irretrievable native skills. With poverty emerging at the social level, economic retraction has challenged Africa with a commodity based trade system and a network system that benefits the colonizing nations. This volatility of primary commodities as well as the Atlantic slave trade unsettled the aboriginal African thought and its significance in the world. Moreover imperialism and the preserved European models disturbed the continent's political culture through instability and inexperience.

Africans lost, Africans migrated, Africans suffered from diaspora and were furthermore discriminated in America and around the world. It was not until the early 20th century when figures like WEB Du Bois started compelling the idea of a respect and unified inception of African force that could trounce the racism. In fact, Du Bois' creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was the trigger for the spread of the idea of unification and uplifting of people of African descent. As the father of Pan Africanism, Du Bois influenced other Pan African thinkers from the United States and Africa. Their view highlights the belonging of all African blooded individuals to a single race that can overcome the European and American hurdles by preserving African traditions and recovering the nationalist support of the victims of diaspora; "The thing to do is to get organized; keep separated and you will be exploited, you will be robbed, you will be killed. Get organized and you will compel the world to respect you".² The idea behind Pan Africanism and its prospects for Africans is a structural transformation based on models and patterns that include cultural, economic, and political changes to pronounce African unity.

² Hord, Fred L., and Jonathan Scott Lee. I Am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy. <https://books.google.com/books?id=rs07LRg7mJMC&pg=PA143&lpg=PA143&dq=you&source=bl&ots=263wB7iaFj&sig=SKlagODbuUh1NSJ9ZobpDW4GRPY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwie14fds4fNAhUOPIIKHSQDCGMQ6AEIMzAF#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

Culturally, the Pan African model works towards the transmission of Du Bois' ideals through the media and other products of culturally rich character like music, cinema and literature. The music industry is focused on transmitting the 'black African Rhythm' that makes specific distinctions about black culture and empowers the black soul in and out of the continent. With lyrics like *'Africa I still call you mama. May you neva' be ruled or controlled by no Yankee dollar'* Midnite alludes to the patrimony and pride of African origin and the motherhood of the continent. It also mentions the refusal of foreign control and the notion of 'Africa for Africans'. In the world of screens and the movie industry, Nigerian Nollywood is an evidence of a twenty-first-century Pan African mentality that culturally distances Africans from oversea influences. "What positions Nollywood as a catalyst for Pan-African discourse is precisely that it has no view, no agenda, no ideology, It is a sprawling marketplace of representations. Its storylines are plucked from newspapers, political rumor and urban folklore".³ What distinctively characterizes Nollywood is that it's made of independent contractors and no dominant decisive elites. It therefore instructs society as a whole on what it means to be African rather than a follower of the postcolonial social divisions. In the same way, Emmanuel Soma's literature and promotion of 'The Negritude movement' portrays the significance of the recognition of an inescapable African heritage through the share of innate characteristics. Planned to alter the labels and stereotypes attached to Africa, the literary Negritude Movement includes poets like the Senegalese Sedar Leopold who encourages his readers to 'Let the black blood flow into your blood'.⁴ Through his

³ McCall, John C. The Pan-Africanism We Have: Nollywood's Invention of Africa. August 2007. http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1010&context=anthro_pubS.

⁴ Duckworth, A. R. Leopold Sedar Senghor's Concept of Negritude. The Motley View The Journal of Film, Art and Aesthetics, February 08, 2010. <https://ardfilmjournal.wordpress.com/2010/02/08/leopold-sedar-senghors-concept-of-negritude/>.

writing, Leopold strived to ameliorate the relationship between Africans and African Americans into one single force who he called the 'colonized'. His doctrine pronounced that the colonized should use the tools of the colonizer to prosper and succeed.

Whether Leopold's doctrine on post colonial tactics caused Africa to economically evolve the way it has or not is negligible when taking into account the influence of the African Economic Community and its foundation on Pan Africanism. Within its economic model, Pan Africanism is promoted through the AEC aiming to create a single common currency, free trade areas and a united market for the majority of African states. The Common market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) originated in the mid 1990s and followed an optimistic thought based on self reliance and a shared destiny and works to prevent the abuse of dominance by one state which could break the balance of shared growth. Its Competitive Commission which includes 19 states and 389 million citizens is defined by its treaty as "an organization of free independent sovereign states which have agreed to co-operate in developing their natural and human resources for the good of all their people".⁵ In addition to the idea of economic African unity, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) originated in 1975. Directed at promoting cooperation and integration of the continent, ECOWAS has signed a vast enumeration of treaties that support the Pan African economic model. Similar to the conditions of the Eurozone, ECOWAS signed an agreement with the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa to create trade liberalization policies and macroeconomic policy convergence within the different countries of the region, creating one single trading model. Pan Africanism towards natural resources can be seen in

⁵ COMESA - Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. United Nations: Economic Commission for Africa. <http://www.uneca.org/oria/pages/comesa-common-market-eastern-and-southern-africa>.

ECOWAS's agreement with West Africa Power Pool guaranteeing an efficient exploitation and distribution of resources between the member countries. The European Union is not only a resemblance to the Pan African Economic model but it has been involved in African political and economic treaties like the Cotonou Agreement which gave Africa an increased global participation as well as a guidance for political and development cooperation.

So far there are economic African associations in different regions of the continent. The next step for creating one big African community is the proposed Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) which aspires to link the existing blocks of COMESA, SADC and EAC. The treaty is expected to "ease the movement of goods across member countries, which account for more than half of the continent's gross domestic product. It will also set up a common framework for preferential tariffs among the member nations".⁶ However, with market integration and infrastructure and industrial development between the regions as main targets, TFTA is facing the reality of poor quality roads, rails and infrastructure which will have to be overcome to make its goals possible.

Politically, the Pan African model is based on a new wind of change that hopes for the political integration of all African countries into one single of power. To encourage the validity of this goal, the continental African Union and the Pan African Coalition work in a mutually inclusive fashion. With the AU established six years prior to the emergence of PAC in 2008, the Pan African intellectuals already have a territorial integrated continent of 54 united countries to work upon. PAC's main accords include the

⁶ Mathew, Jerin. 26 African Nations to Sign Continent's Largest Free-trade Agreement. International Business Times RSS. June 10, 2015. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/26-african-nations-sign-continents-largest-free-trade-agreement-1505374>.

recognized sovereignty for each country, non-aggressive and peaceful practices, mutual defense membership, equal representation in the union and a democratic participation including the election of the president of the coalition. All these prerequisites support the idea that the association seeks for a structural transformation promoting African Unity. To pursue this integrity using Leopold's theory of distancing politics from colonialism, Pan African intellectuals of the AU have created the New Partnership for African Development also known as NEPAD, directed towards the achievement of self rule and the decolonization of the continent. "Born of a desire to revive a much-maligned continent, ravaged by centuries of exploitation, oppression, war and hunger, these new initiatives have formed part of a concerted drive by new African leaders to put the continent on a track towards sustainable growth and development".⁷ NEPAD's political and economic perspectives add tremendous importance to the guarantee of peace, security and global integrity. Likewise, the treaty fosters the commitment of African leaders to the African people and the world by positively impacting the living conditions and the success of treaties like the Cotonou Agreement.

These Pan African routes promote a single thought and structure between the African people, but it is pivotal to mention the challenges they've faced during the last years. One of the main problems, which is rooted in Africa's past, is the historically known 'Balkanization', where the boundaries drawn during colonization have developed into the creation of small hostile states with conflict and tension between them. Citizen unrest is mainly displayed through conflictive practices like South Sudan's desire of independence, the Egyptian conflict between ruling elites and citizens that

⁷ Mathews, K. Renaissance of Pan-Africanism: The African Union. India International Centre. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/23005987.pdf?_=1464663301083.

overestimates democratic power, or Tunisians' longing for political change. There is still large foreign ownership of poor countries and poor implementation of regional economic deals as well as tariffs and high political suppression under the thought of surrendering national sovereignty.

However, all these challenges are mainly caused by the longstanding economic and political inequalities between member states. Worldwide organizations like the UN Commission on Trade and Development are giving integration funds to help the poorer countries in Africa. Through measures like this, Pan Africanism grows on the basis that all African countries will reach economic equality and will be able to cooperate and share growth. The increase on institutionalization will also be a helpful measure to develop the Pan African political model as recurring stable patterns of political behavior will make it more likely for society to be included and more peacefully involved in politics.

Pan Africanism is the idea of uniting the black people around the world. Its economic and political models foster the idea of uniting African countries in a similar way to the European Union. Monetary, democratic and leadership agreements as well as the empowerment of black, shared, cultural values have taken Pan African intellectuals to link all conscious-minded Africans internationally and to rise the continent as one strong fist.



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⁸ Digital image. Exploring Pan-Africanism in Addis Ababa. May 18, 2013. <http://www.diretube.com/uploads/articles/667104ae.png>.

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