

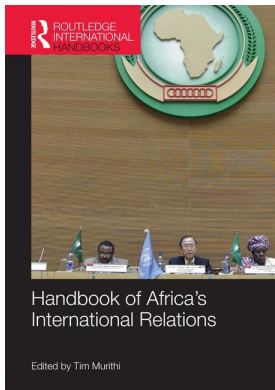
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Pan-Africanism and the international system

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Introduction

Pan-Africanism is, above all, an international phenomenon and, as such, it should deal with power and interest and their dynamics in the international arena: international political forums and international political economy.¹

This chapter fills a yawning gap in studies of the international system through analysis of pan-Africanism as a worldview that played a major role in shaping the direction of global politics since the end of the 19th century. Of course, pan-Africanism is more than a simple worldview and this chapter will engage with its multifaceted meanings within global politics and its shifting character across time since 1900. Broadly speaking, pan-Africanism is about black race consciousness; self-determination of the black race; unity of the African people, including those in the diaspora; economic development of African people; and finding a dignified niche for Africans within the international system.

The re-emergence of pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism is re-emerging as a discourse within the global South, which offers a counter worldview to the dominant hegemonic Eurocentric worldview. Pan-Africanism recognizes, defines and interprets the current modern international system as a racially hierarchized, patriarchal, imperial, colonial, heteronormative and capitalist global social order.² According to Ramon Grosfoguel at the apex of this truncated and 'Eurocentric universalism' and global social order is the USA and the rest of the Western world, and at the subaltern bottom is the global South in general and the African continent in particular.³

At the centre of this modern international system is 'coloniality', defined as one of the key constitutive elements that entrench the worldview defined by a Eurocentric global social order that was constructed during the time of colonial encounters between Europe and Africa. In this context, Anibal Quijano defined and articulated 'coloniality' as a Eurocentric project based on the imposition of a racial, ethnic and gender classification of the global population as the cornerstone and defining element of the modern international system.⁴

One of the main consequences of 'coloniality' was the Berlin Conference of 1884 where the African continent was approached as a land of material and human opportunities for reaping and sharing among Europeans.⁵ According to the imperatives of the 'Berlin consensus' the African

continent was nothing but 'a philosophical, historical, and cultural vacuum' and a 'dark continent' that had to be 'penetrated' and 'civilized' by white races.⁶ Adekeye Adebajo wrote about the 'curse of Berlin' to encapsulate a single global event, the historical and structural impact of which continues to shape and affect Africa's place in contemporary international relations.⁷

The modern international system is therefore rooted in racial articulation of global social identities into white and black, and geocultural demarcations of the world into Europe, America, Asia and Africa. This invention of the modern world that was permeated through by Eurocentrism was not only informed by a conception and differentiation of humanity into 'inferior and superior, irrational and rational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern', but also by capitalist imperatives that unleashed such 'darker' aspects of modernity as mercantilism, the slave trade, so-called 'legitimate trade', imperialism, colonialism, apartheid and globalization on the African world.⁸

Pan-Africanism emerged as a response to the manifestations of the 'darker' aspects of modernity, particularly the slave trade which constituted one of the most inhuman elements of the unfolding and expansion of modernity into areas outside of Europe and America. Locksley Edmondson argued that:

Pan-Africanism, however articulated or conceptualized, whatever its functional scope or operational habitat, is by definition an international relations phenomenon. The essential aspect of pan-Africanism, indeed its distinctive characteristic within the complex of black racial expressions, is that it necessarily transcends territorial political boundaries. And when, in its most expansive manifestation, pan-Africanism embraces a range of transcontinental relations, international relations analysis necessarily bears profoundly on the elucidation of that phenomenon.⁹

The slave trade that adversely affected Africans was not an aberration of modernity, but a logical consequence of the mercantile, imperial and colonial imperatives that emerged from the 15th century onwards. This imperative was part of what Quijano has described as a 'colonial matrix of power' that entailed control over labour and its products; nature and its productive resources; gender and its products, including the reproduction of the species; subjectivity, including its material and intersubjective products such as knowledge; and authority and its instruments, including coercion.¹⁰

Epistemologically speaking, pan-Africanism can best be described as a world view emerging from the subaltern world, that is, a world inhabited by what Frantz Fanon termed the 'wretched of the earth'.¹¹ The 'wretched of the earth' included those who experienced the slave trade, colonialism and apartheid, whose life experiences invoked a spirit of resistance and rebellion against the debilitating aspects of a racially hierarchized, patriarchal, imperial, colonial and capitalist modern global social order which authorized and enabled the dominant powers of the West to enslave and colonize black races.¹² The genealogy of pan-Africanism is located within the experience of oppression which inevitably provoked resistance. Thus, pan-Africanism is ontologically a resistance movement and a terrain of struggles for black human dignity and human rights, confirming Mahmood Mamdani's analysis that 'without the fact of oppression, there can be no practice of resistance and no notion of rights'.¹³

International Relations and pan-Africanism

What is surprising is that in mainstream studies of International Relations (IR), pan-Africanism is not included as one of the important worldviews. Pan-Africanism, which arose as part of black racial consciousness, unfolded as a movement and worldview that questioned and indicted the dominant Eurocentric conceptions of the world, thus contributing towards visibilization of black identity as dominated, oppressed, abused and exploited by white races. The issue of race

as a core element used to justify black enslavement and colonization by white races provoked William Edward Burghardt du Bois, one of the fathers of pan-Africanism to articulate the contours of the human struggles of the 20th century in this way: ‘The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of colour-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and islands of the sea.’¹⁴

This ubiquity of race in the history of black oppression and exploitation to which pan-Africanism emerged as response remains outside core concerns of IR as a discipline that seeks to understand the international system. This absence of engagement with the question of identity provoked Albert J. Paolini to pose the following pertinent questions:

Why is it that international relations, a discourse that sets out to explain the character of contemporary world politics and theorize the behaviour of states, makes so little space for questions of identity, subjectivity, and modernity, particularly as they apply to non-Western places such as Africa? Why do we need to make sense of world politics by referring to abstract concepts such as the state, sovereignty, order, and power than delving into the elementary human realm of culture and identity, which underpins the privileged categories of international relations?¹⁵

A recent book edited by Martin Griffiths entitled *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century* deals with nine worldviews that were considered to underpin IR and represent the world, but there is no mention of pan-Africanism as a worldview. Griffiths defines a worldview as ‘a broad interpretation of the world and an application of this view to the way we judge and evaluate activities and structures that shape the world’.¹⁶ The nine worldviews analysed in Griffiths’s book are Realism, Liberal Internationalism, Marxism, Critical Theory, Constructivism, The English School, Poststructuralism, Feminism and Postcolonialism.¹⁷ The absence of pan-Africanism as a worldview in this collection indicates how it is sidelined within studies of the international system.

The best way to deal effectively with multifaceted and multi-layered essences and meanings of pan-Africanism is to adopt an historical approach that takes into account its key moments of development since 1900. This chapter therefore deals with three moments, beginning with the phase of convening of pan-African congresses; the era of the Organization of African Unity (OAU); and the current phase of the African Union (AU) and its drive for regional integration and ultimately continental unity. This approach is in tandem with Tim Murithi’s idea of defining the unfolding and development of pan-Africanism in terms of what he called ‘stages in the institutionalization of Pan-Africanism’.¹⁸

The contextualizing pan-Africanism and the pan-African congresses

As stated earlier, Pan-Africanism is rooted in struggles against the racially hierarchized international system that authorized the slave trade. The slave revolts in the so-called ‘New World’ and the literary works produced in the ‘slave triangle’ indirectly laid the foundations of pan-Africanism prior to West India bannister Henry Sylvester-Williams, formation of the African Association in London in 1897 that encouraged pan-African unity throughout the British colonies and prior to him organizing the first international Pan-African Congress in 1900.¹⁹

The 1900 inaugural Pan-African Congress was very important because, for the first time, the black people who were on the receiving end of racism and colonialism gathered at the centre of a leading colonial power (Britain) to discuss such varied issues as the socio-political and

economic conditions of blacks in the diaspora; the question of independent nations governed by people of African descent (Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia); the problem of slavery and imperialism and the impact of Christianity on the African continent.²⁰

The important result of this Pan-African Congress was the drafting of an address 'To the Nations of the World' by du Bois which contained demands for the reform of the colonial system, including demands for the protection of the rights of people of African descent and guarantees for the respect for the integrity and independence of 'the free Negro States of Abyssinia, Liberia and Haiti'.²¹ The report was signed and sent to Queen Victoria of England. For the first time, the term 'pan-African' was placed in the centre of the international system.

The intellectual baton and the idea of pan-Africanism were then carried forward by du Bois, who subsequently hosted five Pan-African Congresses between 1919 and 1945. The hosting of Pan-African Congresses was well timed to coincide with major European events that had an impact on black people or had the potential to ignore African people's issues. For example, the 1919 Pan-African Congress held in Paris, France, coincided with the gathering of European and American politicians for a Peace Conference in Versailles, France, marking the end of the First World War (1914–18). The black representatives again demanded international protection of the black people of Africa from abuse, exploitation and violence; supervision of African colonies by the League of Nations to prevent further economic exploitation by foreign nations; abolition of slavery and capital punishment of colonial subjects; rights of black people to education within colonies; and rights of African people to participate in government.²²

Another important and distinctive Pan-African Congress among three others was the one held in Manchester, UK, in 1945. Its significance lay in the participation of African politicians from the African continent such as Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta. Before the 1945 Pan-African Congress, the pan-African movement was dominated by diaspora Africans. Second, the Manchester Pan-African Congress resolutions departed from the moderate position into radical demands, including calling for an end to colonialism. Colonized people were directly urged to unite and assert their rights to reject colonialism.²³

However, an exclusive focus on the Pan-African Congresses organized by du Bois as the motive forces of pan-Africanism tend to exclude the important contribution of Marcus Mosiah Garvey (a Jamaican) and his influential Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Unlike all those who pushed the idea of pan-Africanism through Pan-African Congresses, Garvey emphasized the issues of raising black racial consciousness and became popular for his 'back-to-Africa' movement and his radical slogan of 'Africa for Africans'. Uppermost in Garvey's activities was the restoration of black people's consciousness and dignity which slavery and colonialism had degraded. He also imagined the creation of 'a strong and powerful Negro nation in Africa'.²⁴ Despite some of its contradictions and ambiguities, Garveyism had a lot of influence among black people across the world and inside Africa, and contributed to the raising of black consciousness and rise of movements such as the one that was led by Steve Bantu Biko in South Africa in the 1970s.

At another level, even prior to the Pan-African Congresses such African thinkers as Blyden and Horton from West Africa also propagated pan-African ideas too.²⁵ This reality underlined the fact that pan-Africanism had various genealogies and was watered from various intellectual springs. The diverse genealogies contributed to pan-Africanism assuming an omnibus character: being concerned about unity of black people; acknowledging black people's rights to self-determination in Africa; asserting the dignity of black people across the world; asserting uniqueness of African identity; searching for equality of Africans with other races across the globe; and seeking self-government for the black peoples of Africa.²⁶ Ali Mazrui identified three forms of pan-Africanism, namely sub-Saharan pan-Africanism, trans-Saharan pan-Africanism

and transatlantic pan-Africanism. The first emphasized solidarity of black people of the African continent south of the Sahara desert, the second emphasized African unity from the Cape to Cairo, and the third emphasized unity and solidarity of all black people, including those in the diaspora.²⁷ What is clear is that combinations of these pan-Africanisms contributed to the galvanization of the decolonization process in Africa because without decolonization it was impossible to realize any of the strands.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the international system

The OAU was a result of the African drive to institutionalize the principles of pan-Africanism, although its formation in 1963 did not fulfil the radical and maximalist vision of Kwame Nkrumah who wanted the establishment of an African Union government straight away to lay the basis of a United States of Africa. The OAU was launched within a context of tensions between forces of territorial nationalism with its proclivity towards national sovereignty and imperatives of pan-Africanism which were considered by some sovereignty-obsessed African leaders as a threat to hard-won national-judicial sovereignties.

In the early 1960s, African leaders became fragmented into three groups, namely the Brazzaville, Casablanca and Monrovia blocs. The first group constituted mainly those African leaders who were aligned to France. They were very moderate in their support for pan-Africanism emphasizing economic co-operation rather than political unity. The leading personalities in this bloc like Felix Houphouët-Boigny, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Hamani Diori and others were under the tutelage of the French leader Charles de Gaulle, who influenced them to dissociate with radical African leaders who wanted political union of African states. The Brazzaville Group emphasized co-operation with France despite its neo-colonial 'Eurafrika' policy over solidarity with other African states.²⁸ They feared most the radical Nkrumahist ideas of political union that were 'ideologically socialist and pan-Africanist at once'.²⁹

The second group consisted of Ghana under Nkrumah and some who favoured a decisive and radical approach towards institutionalization of Pan-Africanism, including the establishment of a strong political unity of the continent as a prerequisite for economic co-operation. The third group occupied a middle ground but was more leaning towards the Brazzaville Group, and its leading voice was Nigeria which feared the dominance of Ghana under Nkrumah over the whole of Africa.³⁰

The Monrovia Group's position—which emphasized absolute equality and sovereignty of African states, the right to existence of individual states and freedom from annexation by another state, voluntary union of states, principles of non-interference in the domestic affairs of African states and prohibition of one state harbouring a dissident from another state—won the day and informed the construction of the OAU.³¹ The OAU became a product of a compromise and did not push hard for realization of continental unity. Instead the OAU became active in supporting the ideas of total decolonization of Africa which was in tandem with territorial nationalism.

It must be noted that the dreams of pan-African unity were further diluted by the imperative of the Cold War (1945–89), which contributed to the fragmentation of postcolonial African states along ideological lines (socialist versus capitalist).³² The middle-roaders preferred non-alignment. On top of this, the erstwhile colonial powers also attracted former colonies into such organizations as the British Commonwealth which was not in sync with the principles of pan-Africanism. The late 20th century was also dominated by discourses of a New World Order (NWO) which was expected to crystallize around the notions of 'unipolarity' of the world and emphasis on co-operation and maintenance of global peace and security. Within this

order, the USA as the sole superpower was expected to shift its foreign policy to support a democratic revolution in Africa.³³

By this time of the NWO discourses the OAU was pushing hard for the completion of the decolonization process while at the same time the other important issue was how to extricate African economies from the morass of underdevelopment. The Lagos Plan of Action of 1980 constituted a centrepiece of the African attempt to re-launch economic recovery of Africa informed by mobilization of indigenous resources and driven by Africans as opposed to the disastrous externally imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes that unfolded from the late 1970s onwards as a panacea to the problems of underdevelopment. In short, through the work of the OAU Liberation Committee the decolonization of Africa was achieved. The transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa in 1994 was the penultimate of the continental decolonization project. While the decolonization of the continent remains one of the proudest moments in African history, under the OAU the pursuit of other goals of pan-Africanism such as political and economic unity of Africa were postponed until the time when the OAU was succeeded by the African Union in July 2002. As put by Kay Mathews:

The OAU was more political than economic in its orientation. It was conceived primarily from a desire to safeguard and consolidate Africa's political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.³⁴

The setting of the economic agenda for Africa had to preoccupy the African leaders at the dawn of the 20th century, when the political burden was to ensure that Africa claimed the new century as its own.

African renaissance, the African Union (AU) and the revival of pan-African unity

The dawn of the 21st century witnessed the rise of the millennial African renaissance as a revival of the Nkrumahist vision of a politically, ideologically and economically united African continent able to use its abundant economic wealth to benefit Africans. The mantle of pan-Africanism was now taken over by what Kay Mathews termed 'the new generation of Pan-Africanists'—leaders who included Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, Abdul-Aziz Bouteflika of Algeria, Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique and Alpha Oumar Konare of Mali.³⁵ These were the 'new pan-Africanists' whom Mathews described as 'the renascent generation' engaged in 'revitalizing and remaking of a new Africa'.³⁶ The revived philosophy of African renaissance as re-articulated by Mbeki provided the overarching ideological framework for the new initiatives to rebuild Africa into a strong and united pan-African entity.

The 'new pan-Africanists' pushed forward the agenda of pan-Africanism to the level of translation of the ideology and its claims into practical political and economic policies as well as creation of practical continental institutions capable of repositioning the African continent within global governance structures as a voice to be heard rather than a problem to be solved. Thus from its formation in July 2002, the AU tried to transcend the culture of being a mere 'talking forum' and engaged in the difficult task of creation and operationalization of new pan-African institutions. An array of new institutions emerged, such as the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and others as levers for the eventual creation of a Union Government for Africa.³⁷

The 'new generation of pan-Africanists' are concerned about Africa's over-dependency on the external world economically and even in terms of technological know-how; Africa's failure to exploit fully its potential at national, regional and continental level with respect to trade, education and health; mobilization of the African diaspora to assist with the economic development of the African continent; and reversing the asymmetrical global power relations that were installed by Western modernity whereby African is confined to a subaltern position in international relations.³⁸ According to the radical group of African leaders, particularly the late Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi of Libya, these noble African concerns cannot be realized without achievement of political unity of the continent.

What is disappointing about the discourses on the formation of a Union Government for Africa is that they seem to degenerate into the 1960s camps of what Delphine Lecoutre categorized as the 'maximalists' who advocated the immediate creation of a Union Government for Africa, the 'gradualists' who are struck in the 'stage-by-stage' integration process taking place within regional economic communities (RECs), and the 'sceptics' who are taking a middle position between the 'maximalists' and the 'gradualists'.³⁹ The fact that at the Accra Summit of African Heads of States and Governments in July 2007 to decide on the path to be followed towards attainment of a Union Government for Africa, the 'gradualists' won the day as they did in 1963 at the formation of the OAU, indicates a continuing challenge of when the time will be ripe to launch a United States of Africa. The next concomitant question is: have the 'gradualists' not been given enough time to decide since the 1960s when the debate on a Union Government first emerged?⁴⁰

What is clear is that the Accra Summit failed to deliver a radical roadmap on the path to be followed towards creation of a Union Government for Africa, but on 27 November 2007, the African Union Ministerial Committee on the Union Government met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to address some of the issues raised by the Accra Declaration. What can be highlighted about this meeting is that while it was haunted by the fragmentations that were prominent at the Accra Summit, it managed to draw a time frame for the launch and operationalization of a Union Government for Africa.⁴¹ The African Union has moved further towards the conversion of its Commission into an Authority with more power, as well as projecting 2017 as an important benchmark in the achievement of deeper continental integration. These recent moves by the AU are most welcome because it would seem that at this time of intensifying globalization, Africa can only succeed economically and be counted within global governance if it is truly united on the basis of pan-Africanism to articulate a common position at the global high table.

Conclusion

The key challenge to the success of pan-Africanism as an alternative worldview which emerged from the unequal encounters between Europe and Africa that was characterized by such inimical processes as mercantilism, the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism and globalization, is how to equalize the asymmetrical power relations created by Western modernity as it exported its darker/underside aspects to the non-Western world. Without direct engagement with 'coloniality' and the preparedness of the Euro-American world to unite with Africans in particular and peoples of the global South in general, to change fundamentally the current racially hierarchized, patriarchal, capitalist, heteronormative and hegemonic global social order shot through by Eurocentrism, the space for realization of a United States of Africa that is truly postcolonial and independent to pursue an autonomous economic and political path unencumbered by the hidden colonial matrices of power remains minimal. The global capitalist

imperatives that inform ‘new imperialism’ orchestrated by the USA and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners does not support a strong and united African continent within the current modern international system because such a new strong actor from the global South will not entertain exploitative forays of Europe and USA that underdevelop Africans.

At another level, the pan-African project has suffered causalities with the exit from the political stage of such leaders as Mbeki and Obasanjo. African leaders need to transcend the narrow nationalism that privileges individual and fragile state sovereignties at a time when even powerful and industrialized European states are maximizing the values of pan-Europeanism via the strengthening of the European Union (EU). What is clear is that pan-Africanism as a counter-hegemonic worldview must intensify the struggle for a just international system that does not interfere with the agenda of building a United States of Africa as a strong global economic and political actor able to bargain effectively on behalf of the African people at such forums as the World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and United Nations.

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