Kwame Nkrumah and Pan-Africanism in West Africa

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West Africa has been the birthplace of some of the most advanced forms of African nationalism and Pan-Africanism. The development of the latter, in particular, became prominent in the region due to the crucial role played by indigenous thinkers as well as to its strong connections with the Atlantic world. West Africa became the fertile ground for the advancements of struggles for rights, freedom and ultimately unity of African people and people of African descent. George Shepperson defined West Africa as the “distributing point for all-African ideologies.”1 J. Ayodele Langley further stressed this point. He argued that “within the triangle of transatlantic influences, West Africa was at once the recipient, critic and disseminator of Pan-Negro ideas.”2

Since the roots of Pan-Africanism can be identified in the abolitionist movements, West Africa emerges as one of the most important regions in the continent, an area where these ideas and battles were conceived and from where they were spread. It is also in West Africa that, during the nineteenth century, some of the first and most active Pan-African or Pan-Negro thinkers made their appearance. Edward W. Blyden, James Africanus Beale Horton, Majola Agbebi, Orishatukeh Faduma are just a few of the intellectuals which brought about the establishment of Pan-African and Pan-West African thinking.

In the twentieth century, other intellectuals and activists followed in the footsteps of these figures and campaigned for the unity and liberation of the West African region and ultimately the entire continent. While in French-speaking West Africa intellectuals conceived forms of cultural Pan-Africanism, which later evolved in the Négritude movement, English-speaking West Africa saw the emergence of a more political form of Pan-Africanism. This political Pan-Africanism became fully intertwined with radical African nationalism. Such a situation, according to Geiss, created an “inter-dependence of African nationalism and Pan-Africanism,” which characterized the actions and thoughts of all the major figures in English-speaking West Africa in the twentieth century.3 Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford paved the way by initiating and coordinating the first political form of Pan-West African nationalism, embodied in the National Congress of British West Africa (1920–1930). Later, starting from the 1930s, a new generation of political leaders spread the Pan-Africanist and nationalist thinking in West Africa and beyond. ITA Wallace Johnson, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Kwame Nkrumah stand out as the most important protagonists of this period. Kwame

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Nkrumah’s radical Pan-Africanist agenda, in particular, represented the height of Pan-Africanism in West Africa, as he was the first West African leader and thinker to fully extend his Pan-Africanist thinking and policies to the whole continent.

This chapter will retrace the history of Pan-Africanist thinking in West Africa, illustrating how different ideas and conceptions eventually converged into Kwame Nkrumah’s thinking. Starting from the first abolitionist movements that considered West Africa as one of the centers of early Pan-Africanism, this chapter will illustrate the thoughts and actions of the main thinkers and leaders that opened the way to Nkrumah. The chapter will then offer the perspective on Pan-Africanist thinking in the region following the demise of the Ghanaian Pan-Africanist, examining its evolution until today.

Abolitionism and the early Pan-African thinkers in West Africa

The West African region was fully involved in what Geiss has defined as “proto Pan-Africanism,” a period during which Africans and people of African descent began organizing forms of resistance against their oppression and exploitation by people of European descent in Europe, Africa and the Americas. For centuries, African people and people of African descent had been suffering from slavery and the slave trade, when in the final decades of the eighteenth century a strong abolitionist movement made its appearance. Their challenge and struggle was aimed on the one hand to terminate the slave trade and slavery and on the other to eradicate the racial prejudice which had characterized the relationship between Europeans and Africans for a long period of time. Geiss identifies the date of birth of “proto Pan-Africanism” as 1787. It is in this year that American Quakers formed an important abolitionist society. It is also in this year that the first attempt was made to form an African American church, the Free African Society. From this early attempt, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1816) and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (1821) emerged, with both playing a fundamental role in missionary work in Africa, especially in the Western part of the continent.

From the beginning, West Africa was actively involved in the abolitionist movement. There were two reasons for this. First, in terms of sheer numbers, about half of the slaves captured and sold in the Americas were coming from this part of the continent. Secondly, some of the first and most powerful African voices in support of the abolitionist movement in the late eighteenth century were West Africans. In Geiss’ crucial year of 1787, Ottobah Cugoano, an ex-slave native of nowadays Ghana, published one of the first and most influential writings against slavery. Two years later, Olaudah Equiano, an ex-slave from nowadays Nigeria and an acquaintance of Cugoano, also published an influential book against slavery in the form of his memoir.

It is again in 1787 that the first attempts were made to found the “Province of Freedom,” which would later evolve into the colony of Sierra Leone (1808). The Province of Freedom was created to colonize the area with “black poors” [sic.] from the UK and eventually ex-slaves. Sierra Leone would play a fundamental role in the era of “proto Pan-Africanism.” According to Geiss, Abolitionism on both sides of the Atlantic, the free Afro-Americans in the United States (and also in the British West Indies) and Sierra Leone between them directly or indirectly helped to produce those modern elites in the New World and in Africa who alone were able to articulate the concept of Pan-Africanism and translate it into political agitation and action in the twentieth century. In a matter of a few decades, “The so-called ‘Sierra Leoneans’ produced the first generation of African intellectuals and proto-nationalists in Nigeria” and other British colonial territories like the Gold Coast. The Fourah Bay
College and the grammar school of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Sierra Leone in particular trained some of the first exponents of “African proto-nationalism” and “Ethiopianism” such as Samuel Crowther and James Johnson, who both operated in Nigeria.\(^\text{10}\) The importance of Sierra Leoneans in Nigeria, called there “Saros,” can also be observed by the fact that Herbert Macaulay, a third-generation Sierra Leonean on his mother’s side, would become the forefather of Nigerian nationalism.

Hailing directly from the early abolitionist movements and the opportunities created by Sierra Leone, the first “back to Africa” movements made their appearance in the early nineteenth century and immediately targeted West Africa as the preferred “haven” for the return of people of African descent to their motherland. Back to Africa movements in particular flourished in the United States, thanks to men like Paul Cuffee, Daniel Coker, Lott Cary, John B. Russwurm, Martin R. Delany, Alexander Crummell and others. The “Back to Africa” idea also gained further recognition through the American Colonization Society (1817) which founded Liberia in 1822 for the return of free African Americans, the colonization of the region by African Americans and the development of commerce between the US and the African continent. From the early nineteenth century to the Second World War, according to Langley, three themes characterized Afro-American attitudes: African colonization schemes, missionary activity and racial Pan-Africanism.\(^\text{11}\) As for the latter, early “Pan-Africanism was understood as ‘Pan-Negroism’, i.e. was defined primarily in racial terms.”\(^\text{12}\)

Both Liberia and Sierra Leone became the centre of a flux of ex-slaves, missionaries and Pan-Africanist thinkers. Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832–1912), in particular, played a fundamental role in shaping early Pan-Africanist thinking, promoting the return of ex-slaves to Africa (especially to Liberia and Sierra Leone) and the establishment of a West African nation. Although not a West African by birth, Blyden lived much of his life between Liberia and Sierra Leone and he is widely considered one of the forefathers of Pan-Africanism and Pan-West African thinking. A prolific writer, Blyden can be easily considered “the most learned and articulate champion of Africa and the Negro race in his own time.”\(^\text{13}\) The main theme of his influential philosophy was that the black race had played a fundamental role in the history of humankind and that, according to a divine plan, it was still destined to play an important role, yet very different from the one of Europeans. In order to achieve this goal, the black race and particularly Africans had to work towards projecting a distinctive “personality.” This concept, first introduced by Blyden in 1893, became known as the “African Personality.”\(^\text{14}\) This would be at the heart of the thinking of several later pan-Africanists, in particular Kwame Nkrumah. While still controversially promoting the intervention of Europeans in Africa to help Africans establish modern nations, Blyden was adamant that Africans were the antithesis of Europeans. At its core, the African personality unveiled the different characters between the two races. As underlined by Lynch, The European character, according to Blyden, was harsh, individualistic, competitive and combative; European society was highly materialistic [...] In the character of the African, averred Blyden, was to be found ‘the softer aspects of human nature’: cheerfulness, sympathy, willingness to serve, were some of its marked attributes. The special contribution of the African to civilization would be a spiritual one.\(^\text{15}\)

Blyden’s philosophy has been often considered controversial and even contradictory. For instance, his promotion of the African personality was often coped with a call for European powers (Britain in particular) to intervene in Africa to help to pacify, unite and develop it. Yet, he also stressed the importance of allowing Africans to cultivate their own traditions and institutions, therefore rejecting the form of colonialism which eventually won over the
whole continent. Also, quite controversially he bitterly criticized “non-pure negroes,” like the “mulattoes” who were ruling Liberia and Sierra Leone (the latter within the colonial society).

Yet, despite some questionable elements included in his writings, his influence on Pan-African thinking was huge and long-lasting. In particular, he envisioned one of the first nationalist and Pan-Africanist projects ever to be presented to African audiences. His was a call to cultivate the African Personality with the final aim of creating an African “nationality.” Pointing at the example offered by the then contemporary fights for independence by people in Europe like the Slavs, Germans and Italians, Blyden proposed the constitution of a form of ethno-nationalism. This, in his mind, was aimed at the creation of a large West African state hailing from Liberia and Sierra Leone and extending to the whole Western portion of the continent. Blyden also envisioned a West African university and an African church. In this latter effort he was supported by one of his disciples, Majola Agbebi, one of the most important West African Pan-Africanists of the late nineteenth century. In the same period, Orishatukeh Faduma (1855–1946) also pushed towards these goals, for instance with the promotion of African clothing and names in West Africa. By 1914 he would support a “back to Africa” movement organized by a West African, Chief Sam.16

While Blyden fundamentally failed in his project to create such a state, or at least an organization to support this goal, he did contribute to establishing the base of Pan-Africanist thinking in West Africa. In particular, English-speaking West Africans began to follow his ideas and doctrines. Blyden himself had contributed in spreading his ideas through a strong network of newspapers, the vehicle of much political activity in these areas between the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth.17

As mentioned, Blyden’s ideas had a great influence in early Pan-Africanist and nationalist circles in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. At the same time, Blyden also had an impact on another area of what would become, by 1874, part of the British colonial empire in West Africa: the Gold Coast. There, nationalist and Pan-Africanist thinking were developing at a fast pace. The southern part of what is known nowadays as Ghana saw the emergence, by the late 1860s, of a short-lived experience of self-governance in a territory by then already under the control of the British, namely the Fanti Confederation (1868–1871). James African Beale Horton (1835–1883) influenced and supported the constitution of the confederation. The Sierra-Leonean born Horton campaigned for the self-government of British African territories and he also strongly believed in the need for an “African nationality,” in this matching the preaching of his friend Blyden.18 Author of several book, his West African Countries and People (1868) remained for decades one of the most influential writing on African nationalism and Pan-West African thinking, together with Blyden’s Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race (1887).

By the end of the nineteenth century, a new influential figure, influenced by both Blyden and Horton, emerged. He was Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford (1866–1930). His work and thinking would pave the way to a new generation of West African nationalists and Pan-Africanists in the twentieth century.

Pan-African and Pan-West African thinking in the early twentieth century

In 1897, the Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society (ARPS) was established in the Gold Coast as a new and ground-breaking political instrument. This was founded by J.W. de Graft-Johnson, J. W. Sey, J. P. Brown, John Mensah Sarbah and J. E. Casely Hayford to
serve as a political instrument to advance the demands of Gold Coast natives. The latter two founders are remembered as leading political thinkers of early twentieth century West Africa. As for Mensah Sarbah, his book *Fanti Customary Law* (1897) was praised by Blyden for its ideas on African nationality. Casely Hayford, one of Blyden’s disciples, would become widely known thanks to his influential writings on Pan-Africanism and nationalism, being him like Blyden and Mensah Sarbah a sponsor of the “African nationality.” His ideas and political projects, compared to Blyden’s, were more concrete. They lead indeed to the creation of a political organization: the National Congress of British West Africa. This would be the first attempt to put Pan-Africanism into practice in West Africa.

A lawyer interested in politics, Casely Hayford published his first book *Gold Coast Native Institutions* in 1903, and wrote the introduction to Blyden’s *West Africa before Europe* (1904). Just one year before Blyden’s death, in 1911, he published his most famous book *Ethiopia Unbound*. This, according to Adi, was “one of the first African novels with a strong Pan-African theme,” dedicated indeed to the “sons of Ethiopia the world wide over.” Casely Hayford was aware of the debates going on the United States amongst African American intellectuals and their influence in West African intellectual circles. Quite decisively he, being amongst the first to do so, criticized the most prominent African American intellectuals of that time and instead praised his tutor Blyden: “The works of men like Booker T. Washington and W. E. Burghart Du Bois is exclusive and provincial. The work of Edward Wilmot Blyden is universal. Covering the entire race and the entire race problem.” Blyden’s thought, Casely Hayford warned the reader, was the real answer for the Pan-Africanist movement. Africans and people of African descent had to search Blyden’s writings for the solution to their problems. This can be considered further proof of the birth of a proper nationalist and Pan-Africanist thinking in West Africa, one that was no longer dependent on the “intellectual inputs” coming from the other side of the Atlantic. Casely Hayford was adamant that the political initiative for attaining self-government and unity in Africa should have been left to indigenous intellectuals. As noted by Langley, indeed: his strictures in *Ethiopia Unbound* were directed against the political messianism and crusading spirit of New World Pan-Negroists who had exalted notions about civilizing and leading a “benighted” Africa. Those groups were potentially subversive and did not fit in with the views and interests of constitutional nationalists and conservative Pan-Africanists of West Africa. Casely Hayford stated clearly that West Africans had to lead the Pan-Africanist movement for the whole African race in the world: “Here, then, is work for cultured West Africans to start a reform which will be world-wide in its effects among Ethiopians.”

This does not mean that Casely Hayford and other West African Pan-Africanists of his time were indifferent to what was happening outside West Africa. For instance, contemporaries of the 1900 Pan-African Conference and particularly the “budding nationalists in West Africa” gave it a wide coverage and “were optimistic about its potentialities.” The Du Bois-Garvey disputes also interested West Africans at different levels. Casely Hayford, however, had stressed the need for concrete political action coming from the intellectual elites of West Africa as he wanted to draw the attention to the African continent as the source of the solutions to the problems of the Gold Coast and the other colonial territories. Similar points were raised in the same period by another Gold Coast philosopher, lawyer and nationalist, Kobina Sekyi (1892–1956).

Influenced by Horton and Blyden’s ideas, but also by the South African Native National Congress (1912), the Wilsonian principle of self-determination and the Paris Pan-African Congress (1919), the National Congress of British West Africa (N CBWA) was founded in 1920 by Casely Hayford to present petitions to the British crown. The NCBWA, born as an
amalgamation of previously existing committees was aimed at coordinating the demands coming from all the West African territories under British rule. In the Gold Coast, “the concept of a West African nationality preceded the ideal of Gold Coast nationhood.” 26 This form of nationalism was shared also by Nigerians, Sierra Leoneans and Gambians. Indeed, “educated West Africans from the various British territories had more in common with one another than with the illiterate peasants of their own countries.” 27 Casely Hayford had already expressed it clearly in 1913 when referring to a united West Africa: “United we stand divided we fall.” 28 While still recognizing the authority of the Union Jack and being fundamentally a constitutional nationalist, through the NCBWA, Casely Hayford brought forward the idea of a “West African nationality,” a term that remained vague. 29 The NCBWA also campaigned for the establishment of a West African University. 30 The organization ceased its activities shortly after Casely Hayford’s death in 1930.

Despite the innovative ideas brought forward by the NCBWA, the organization did not prove successful in putting most of its political objectives into practice. Nevertheless, the long-term influence of this experience in West African political circles was remarkable.

In the metropoles of the main colonial powers of West Africa, France and Britain, a growing community of African students and workers organized cultural and political Pan-African organizations. In both contexts, West Africans had a leading role. The first African organization emerged in Britain in the late nineteenth century. 31 It was, however, only in the 1920s, that proper Pan-African and Pan-West African organizations were formed in the metropole of the British Empire. The key-figure of this period was the Nigerian Ladipo Solanke, who first formed the Nigerian Progress Union (1924) together with Amy Ashwood Garvey and then – influenced by the NCBWA and especially by one of its members, Nigerian-born Herbert Bankole-Bright – he formed the West African Students’ Union (WASU) in 1925. 32 Alongside the NCBWA, WASU soon became the most important incarnation of West African Nationalism and Pan-West African thinking. WASU saw West African Unity as the basis for the unity of the whole continent. As WASU’s president maintained, “if Africans are to survive, West Africa must become a nation, it must unite under the sentiment of national progress.” 33 Both Solanke and the Gold Coaster J.W. de Graft Johnson wrote influential books on West African unity. 34 In the 1930s, WASU became also well-known in West Africa, by opening branches and by supporting colonial reforms and local struggles, like the 1938 Gold Coast cocoa hold-up. In the mid-1930s, the already influential Trinidadian Pan-Africanist and ex-communist George Padmore moved to London and there co-founded the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA), an association which included Pan-Africanists and West African nationalists (including members of the ARPS). In 1937, he established the International African Service Bureau (IASB). The experience of the Bureau connected with Du Bois’ tradition of Pan-African Congresses led, in June 1944, to the creation of the Pan-African Federation (PAF), headed by Padmore and aimed at organizing the 5th Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945. 35 West Africans played a major role in both the PAF and the Congress. 36

Similarly to Britain, proto Pan-Africanist organizations were formed in France in late nineteenth century. 37 It was, however, the experience of the First World War, when hundreds of thousands of African soldiers fought for France in Europe, that led to the development of the first political organizations to channel strong critiques to the Empire by Africans living in France. Also similarly to Britain, French speaking West Africans had a leading role in these organizations. The first of these was the Ligue Universelle pour la Défense de la Race Noire (LUDRN), established in 1924 by Dohomey-born Tovalou Houenou. The latter not only led the organization but also established contacts with Garvey’s Universal Negro
Improvement Association (UNIA), travelling in the US in 1924 and participating in UNIA’s congress, introduced by Garvey himself. Although approving Garvey’s radicalism, Houénon also stressed the importance that each black organization should operate “according to their own methods, disciplines, and activities,” claiming then autonomy for the LUDRN. After Houénon’s arrest in 1926, the Ligue ceased its activities. Senegalese Lamine Senghor, a member of the defunct LUDRN, led a new organization, the Comité de la Défense de la Race Nègre (CDRN) until his death in 1927. Interestingly, the CDRN used the term “Negro Personality,” in its publication La Race Nègre. Also, the proceedings of WASU were reported in the journal. After Senghor’s death, Sudanese (Malian) Tiémoho Garan-Kouyaté formed and led its reincarnation, the Ligue de la Défense de la Race Nègre (LDRN). The radical Kouyaté linked the activities of the LDRN with those of Red International of Labour Unions and the French Communist Party and, together with George Padmore, edited the ITCW’s journal The Negro Worker. Kouyaté wrote to Du Bois stressing his Pan-African objectives: “setting up in Black Africa a great Negro State. The Negro peoples of the Caribbean will retain the right to form their own confederation, or to rejoin black Africa, once this has been regained.”

All these radical organizations were short-lived, and by the end of the 1930s the Negritude movement – holding a less political and more cultural character of Pan-Africanist thinking – was emerging. Even the Negritude movement was led by a West African, Leopold Senghor.

Meanwhile, in West Africa, two young nationalist, Isaac Theophilus Akunna Wallace-Johnson and Nnamdi Azikiwe, picked up the legacy of Pan-West African thinking in the early 1930s. Wallace-Johnson was a Sierra Leonean trade union activist and nationalist. He moved to the Gold Coast in 1933 and began his political activity by establishing the West African Youth League (WAYL). Through the WAYL, Wallace-Johnson pushed for reforms of the colonial administration in West Africa (especially in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast) and protested against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935–1936). Nnamdi Azikiwe, also active between 1934 and 1936 in the Gold Coast by acting as editor of the newspaper African Morning Post, supported the WAYL and then later found the newspaper West African Pilot in Nigeria in 1937, proving explicitly his belief in the need for West African unity. Also in 1937, his articles on West African nationalism and Pan-Africanism were published in his first book, Renascent Africa.

Both men hugely influenced the early political thinking of the young Kwame Nkrumah, a man destined to play a crucial role in further growth of Pan-West African and Pan African thinking. Through Nkrumah, the ideas of the several Pan-Africanists from Blyden and Horton to Azikiwe and Casely Hayford could find a synthesis, capable of providing a message of unity for the whole continent.

Kwame Nkrumah

Born in 1909, Francis Nkrumah, later known as Kwame Nkrumah, was influenced in his early life in the Gold Coast by personalities such as James Aggrey and Samuel R. Wood. Also listed among the political influences of his youth are ITA Wallace-Johnson and Azikiwe. Once he moved to the US (1935), Nkrumah studied many philosophers and thinkers of nationalism and Pan-Africanism. According to Nkrumah himself, Marcus Garvey’s Philosophy and Opinions “fired” his enthusiasm. While a student at American universities, he became a leader of the African Students’ Association of America and Canada and published a newspaper, The African Interpreter. Through these activities he aimed at reviving a “spirit of
nationalism” among West African students, particularly those from Gold Coast and Nigeria, and pushed forward the idea of West African Unity. Shortly after moving to London in 1945, Nkrumah participated in the organization of the Manchester Pan-African Congress, a crucial landmark in the history of Pan-Africanism. At the time his vision – in line with that of Casely Hayford – was still limited to West Africa. At the Manchester Congress, indeed, he represented the West African region as a rapporteur of the session “Imperialism in North and West Africa.”

After the Congress, Nkrumah, together with Wallace-Johnson, Bankole Awonoor-Renner and Padmore, founded the West African National Secretariat (WANS), and became its first Secretary-General. The WANS was aimed at uniting West African nationalist movements, inheriting the tradition of Casely Hayford’s NCBWA. Between 1945 and 1946 Nkrumah also became Vice President of WASU. In September 1946, after Nkrumah had met the leaders of French Africa in Paris to support a “Union of West African Socialist Republics,” the WASU and WANS jointly organized a conference for West African unity. Crucially, Padmore influenced Nkrumah in connecting the question of the Gold Coast’s independence and West African unity organically with the liberation and unification of the whole continent. In 1947, Nkrumah published his first political pamphlet Towards Colonial Freedom, which represented the core of his Pan-Africanist and nationalist ideas expressed through Marxist analysis. Interestingly, alongside quotations of Giuseppe Mazzini and Wilhelm Liebknecht at the opening of the book was a call for West African unity by Casely Hayford. Between late 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, Nkrumah included also the concept of the “African Personality” in his political discourse, drawing explicitly from Blyden’s Pan-Africanist thinking. This informed many of his future ideas and polices, including the need for Africa to be non-aligned.

At the end of 1947, Nkrumah moved back to the Gold Coast after being invited by the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), to become the party Secretary-General. The new challenge meant “a swift transit” to the territorial dimension of the liberation struggle, but in no way did it mean an abandonment of Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanist plans. In fact, Nkrumah and his mentor and new political adviser Padmore considered the conquest of self-government and ultimately independence of single African territories as a necessary step towards African unity. Nkrumah’s victory at the 1951 elections under the banner of his new Convention People’s Party (1951) was for Padmore: “the first victory for the ideology of Pan-Africanism.” Padmore amply celebrated Nkrumah’s successes in his Gold Coast Revolution (1953) and Pan-Africanism or Communism? (1956).

The quest for West African, and eventually continental, unity was not forgotten in the midst of the struggle for Ghanaian independence. This was included in the constitution of the CPP which referred to both the goals of a “West African Federation” and the establishment of “Pan-Africanism” in Africa. By the time Nkrumah moved to the Gold Coast in 1947, according to his own account, “West African unity was still uppermost in my thoughts.” On his way to his motherland, he strengthened his contacts in Sierra Leone and Liberia to form the basis for talks about a union of West African states after independence. In September 1948, he also travelled to Ivory Coast and Guinea for the same reason. Between 1948 and 1951, he met African leaders such as Wallace-Johnson and Azikiwe for organizing a conference on West African unity. In 1953, finally, the now prime minister of the Gold Coast organized a conference of West African leaders in Kumasi, which, in his plans, would pave the way for a Pan-African Conference to be held in 1954. While the Kumasi Conference proved to be a “very unrepresentative meeting,” it established the basis for a Pan-African conference, the All-African People’s Conference, which would be
organized not in 1954 but in 1958 instead. Both the experience of WANS and the 1953 Kumasi Conference were, according to Langley, “conscious attempts to revive and extend the ideals of the NCBWA.”

On 6 March 1957, at the independence celebrations of Ghana, Nkrumah made it clear in a famous speech, that the independence of Ghana was “meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent.” This, in concrete terms, meant that in his plans Ghana was destined to play a leading role in the continent, first by helping to liberate it and then leading it to its unification. In order to put this plan into practice, he and Padmore set up proper Pan-African institutions in order to support the liberation and unification of the continent: the Bureau of African Affairs, the African Affairs Centre and then, after Padmore’s death (1959), the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute. These operated in parallel with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the other institution of the state, creating a dichotomy between “unorthodox” and “orthodox” systems within the Ghanaian foreign policy machinery.

In 1958, two different Pan-African conferences were organized in Ghana. The first one was the Conference of Independent African States (CIAS) in April. The second one, the AAPC, was scheduled for December. African unity was discussed at the CIAS, but no concrete proposals were put on the table. The opportunity to transform the Pan-African plans into reality came a few months later. When Guinea obtained independence in October (1958), Nkrumah immediately offered to its new president, Sekou Touré, both financial help and the prospect of forming a Union with Ghana. The Ghana–Guinea Union was proclaimed on 23 November 1958. In the opening speech for the AAPC, in December 1958, Nkrumah praised the newly born Ghana–Guinea Union hoping that it would “constitute the nucleus of a United West Africa” and “evolve eventually into a Union of African States just as the original thirteen American colonies have now developed into the 49 States constituting the American community.” The AAPC proved to be an incredibly important gathering that was comparable to the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress. It was indeed imagined by Padmore and Nkrumah to be a new Pan-African Congress, only this time held in Africa with the overall majority of participants from the African continent. Almost all African liberation movements were represented, and Pan-Africanist plans were amply discussed. With the AAPC, Padmore and Nkrumah hoped that the Pan-Africanist torch would pass from the diaspora to the African nationalists. The conference greatly impacted African liberation movements.

Immediately after the AAPC, the first political refugees began to arrive. Since 1959, Accra became a Pan-African hub for hundreds of African nationalists. Nkrumah offered them shelter but also political training. The objective was indeed to create a network of nationalist parties aligned to his Pan-Africanist vision. According to Nkrumah, indeed, only a continent-wide network of African nationalist parties which had embraced the basic principles of “Nkrumaism” could unite the continent and defend it from the threats of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the rapacity of Cold War powers. Nkrumaism can be defined as a Pan-Africanist ideology that included elements of black nationalism, socialism and Gandhism (at least until 1960). The expression of the African Personality – evolved from Blyden’s ideas – was its core concept, which also informed the non-aligned position of Ghana. Nkrumah’s plans for the unity of the continent were expressed clearly in his 1963 book Africa Must Unite.

Nkrumah’s Pan-African plans were more radical and bolder than those of his contemporaries, including Azikiwe’s, and this led to a strong political confrontation with other African leaders at the 1963 OAU founding conference. The new organisation was not even remotely
similar to the one envisaged in *Africa Must Unite*. Whereas Nkrumah had imagined the gathering to be the founding stone of a continental union government, the OAU appeared instead to be a loose association between African states interested primarily in the preservation of their sovereignty. For this reason, until the coup of February 1966, Nkrumah kept fighting to sponsor his Pan-Africanist vision in the continent and carve out a following of radical Pan-Africanist militants who would support his project for a United States of Africa.

After the coup, radical Pan-Africanist visions such as Nkrumah’s began to fade away in West Africa as well as in the rest of the continent. According to Geiss, if the two conferences of 1958 can be considered the “height” of Pan-Africanism, since 1966 “Pan-Africanism as a political movement has been practically dead.” This, however, is only partially true.

**Nkrumah’s political afterlife and modern-day West African Pan-Africanism**

Despite Nkrumah’s downfall, Nkrumism had a profound influence in Africa. Nkrumism influenced the organization and political thought of several liberation movements in Africa. Even independent countries adopted and adapted solutions taken from Nkrumah’s Ghana. Between 1966 and 1972, from his office in Conakry where he went into exile after the coup, Nkrumah kept writing and coordinated the publishing of all his previous and new materials through a publishing company he himself established: Panaf. In his new works, Nkrumah explained in more details the dangers of neo-colonialism and the solutions Pan-Africanism could offer. In 1968, Nkrumah met Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture in honor of Nkrumah and Sekou Touré) in Conakry. There, the two Pan-Africanist established the All-African People’s Revolutionary Party (AARP), a Nkrumaist Pan-Africanist organization which is still active to this date.

Undoubtedly, however, the interest on Pan-Africanism in West Africa as well as in the rest of the continent was waning. At the time of Nkrumah’s death (27 April 1972), the optimistic first season of the African post-independence period, associated with the modernization paradigm, was fading away and the season of “Afro-pessimism” was beginning. For many years, Nkrumah’s figure, once hugely popular in Ghana and Africa partially lost its appeal. Despite few attempts to revitalize it, political Pan-Africanism also seemed to be weakening, or at least it remained crystallized for better days to come. Nyerere became the main proponent of Pan-Africanism after Nkrumah’s death. The Sixth Pan-African Congress was organized in Tanzania in 1974 but it was not followed by another one in 20 years. The Seventh Pan-African Congress took place in 1994 in Uganda.

In Ghana, the memory of the Osagyefo was evoked briefly and contradictorily by the dictator Ignatius Kutu Acheampong (1972–1978). During the first period of his regime, some Nkrumais policies were implemented. Also, Acheampong discussed with Nigerian president Yakubu Gowon the basis for an organization of West African states. During the first round of talks, the basis of what would become the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were discussed. According to K. B. Asante, a Ghanaian diplomat fully involved in the talks, the first draft for the organization was deeply rooted in Nkrumah’s Pan-African thinking: “the idea of ECOWAS started with Nkrumah, with the Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union.” The final form of the organization, however, turned out to be much different than the initial radical plans of early 1975.

Nkrumah’s ideas were once more supported by President Hilla Limann (1979–81) but then abandoned after his overthrow. In general, Nkrumah’s policies and ideas were
considered in Ghana as outdated if not dangerous and in many ways he was “ridiculed,” at least until the mid-1980s. Only after the early 1990s, the figure of Nkrumah began to be properly discussed in Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian circles.

With the exception of the attempts by the ECOWAS to integrate the region, there is still a dearth of a proper Pan-African movement in West Africa. In recent years, Pan-Africanism is often discussed in the region when considering the links with African Americans who visit Ghana and other West African countries to find their origins. In the decades since his death, Nkrumah is still seen as the last great Pan-Africanist in West Africa and many people in the region still look back at his political thought for imagining new ways to put Pan-Africanism into practice.

Notes
5 Out of 12.5 million slaves embarked between 1500 and 1900, circa 6.3 million were coming from West Africa, www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates accessed on 14/02/2019.
6 Ottobah Cugoano, Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species (London, 1787).
11 Langley, Pan-Africanism, p. 18.
14 Lynch, Blyden, p. 216.
15 Lynch, Blyden, pp. 61–62.
16 Langley, Pan-Africanism, pp. 50–51.
20 Adi and Sherwood, Pan-African History, p. 83.
22 Langley, Pan-Africanism, p. 33.
24 Langley, Pan-Africanism, p. 29.
25 See Langley, Pan-Africanism, p. 98–103.
27 Ibid.
29 Langley, Pan-Africanism, p. 118
30 Langley, Pan-Africanism, p. 128
35 James, *Nkrumah*, p. 65.
38 Langley, *Pan-Africanism*, p. 49.
56 Nkrumah, *Ghana*, p. 95.
57 Ibid., pp. 64–65.
58 Ibid., p. 95.
60 Ibid., p. 116.
63 Nkrumah, Midnight pronouncement of Independence at Polo Ground, Accra, 5 March 1957.
64 See Grilli, *Nkrumaism*.

67 See See Grilli, Nkrumaism.


70 See Conclusions of Grilli, Nkrumaism.


73 Interview with K.B. Asante, Accra, 7 November 2013.

74 Ibid.
