

# On Pan-Africanism: Epistemic freedom, Knowledge Production and Decolonizing Politics

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## Introduction

Pan-Africanism is frequently presented as a 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century movement that started with the Pan-African conferences spearheaded by Henry Sylvester Williams and developed into contemporary political units such as the African Union. There is a consensus that its primary goals are: the liberation and unification of the African continent, the creation of a Pan-African political unit, and the conceptualization of the cultural unity of Global African-descended communities. We postulate that the 20<sup>th</sup> century manifestations of Pan-Africanism are the theorization and systematization of earlier expressions of the spirit of Pan-Africanism that have occurred since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This perspective allows us to argue that a careful reading of the entire history of Pan-Africanism shows that it is rooted in an epistemology that questions the foundations of Euro-Modernity and participates in a more complex definition of the concept of “Africa”. We will revisit, in turn, the epistemic relevance of Pan-Africanism at a time when the increasing consciousness of the pervasiveness of coloniality has led to a growing call for decolonization.

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Decolonial scholars have recently systematized something clear to Africanists for the past 200 years. It is that the imagination of an Enlightened “West” and its corollary, the dehumanization of the dark “Rest,” are not two separate projects. The latter is necessary for the existence of the former. Franz Fanon articulates this point in *The Wretched of the Earth* in these terms:

The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values. It is not enough for the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in, the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense, he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces (1963, p. 43).

This Manichean machine is explained and legitimized, as Walter Mignolo argues, by:

The crooked rhetoric that naturalizes ‘modernity’ as a universal global process and point of arrival [and that] hides its darker side, the constant reproduction of ‘coloniality’. In order to uncover the perverse logic that Fanon pointed out underlying the philosophical conundrum of modernity/coloniality and the political and economic structure of imperialism/colonialism, we must consider how to decolonize the ‘mind’ (Thiongo) and the ‘imaginary’ (Gruzinski) that is, knowledge and being (2007, p. 450).

In other words, the dehumanization of a newly invented category, the non-white, the African in particular, is the very condition of the existence of Modernity/Coloniality. In this sense, the condition of possibility of the idea of “Africa,” understood, by the Euro-Modern tradition as the other of the subliminal “West,” is precisely linked to what it is not: A certain representation of the “West” that is only possible with epistemicide, the negation of Africa-centered knowledges and knowledge systems. It is therefore not just a coincidence that the modern moment is also the moment of the colonial encounter with Africa and the institutionalization of slavery. The latter is the condition of possibility of the former.

Despite the seeming pervasiveness of the modern framework, many Africa-centered knowledge systems have resisted and recalibrated to adapt to the onslaught of violence against their right to exist. We argue, in this vein, that since its inception Pan-Africanism as a political and cultural movement geared towards the ultimate liberation of Global African-descended people, understood the necessity to found its political project on epistemologies that escape the Manichean Euro-Modern paradigm. As a matter of fact, people of African descent’s first gesture towards liberation is linked to knowledge production. As a liberation movement, Pan-Africanism must, thus, be read as primarily, an epistemic stand, a method, and a counter-discourse of Modernity. This counter-discourse is not, however, to be understood as a reaction that continues to center the “West” as the history of African studies has frequently done. It is, rather, a different paradigm that can be read as an epistemology founded on a particular idea of “Africa” that has changed from one moment of history to the other. This introduction is therefore

to be read as a means to bear in mind the historical context that allows us to revisit the epistemic relevance of Pan-Africanism at a time when the increasing consciousness of the pervasiveness of coloniality has led to a growing call for decolonization. It prepares us to engage with the contributors' reflections on the ways Pan-Africanism can allow us to rethink individual liberties in the African context, revisit the ethics of inclusion, explore the life stories of key Pan-African figures, and reconsider the contemporary meanings and relevance of Pan-Africanism as an epistemic framework and a political stand.

We will particularly insist on the ways in which the spirit of Pan-Africanism started as a praxis in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, developed into a revolutionary philopraxis<sup>1</sup> in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a theory of "African personality"<sup>2</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and a full fledged movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In all these instances, Pan-Africanism was an epistemic project materialized by the creation of higher education institutions and intellectual journals in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It is therefore logical that Global Africa, a Pan-African institution in scope, proposes a special issue on the contemporary relevance of Pan-Africanism with a particular focus on research in the wake of what can be considered, in the discipline of African studies, a decolonial moment.

## Proto-Pan-Africanism: Freedom, Community, and the Invention of Africa

The understanding of Pan-Africanism as an epistemic stand that attempts to delink from the universalizing framework of Euro-Modernity can be traced back to several pivotal moments in the history of Pan-Africanism that precede the 20<sup>th</sup> century systematization of the movement. People of African descent's first encounter with Euro-Modernity and the institution of slavery is one such moment. It marks the beginning of the Pan-African project through what we consider as an Africa-centered invention of "Africa." In other words, it is with the first encounter with the Euro-Modern forces, that the captured Fulani, Yoruba, and Wolof, etc., invent the idea of "Africa" as a means to escape from the throes of coloniality. This act of invention of Africa is, we argue, a fundamental Pan-African gesture. It consecrates at the same time the birth of the continent and that of the diaspora, thereby setting the epistemic and political foundation of Pan-Africanism. It is important to note, however, that we do not consider this invention of "Africa" as a simple reaction to Euro-Modernity that nonetheless repeats the same colonial logic that it attempts to question. Rather, the first invention of "Africa" that led to the beginning of the philopraxis of Pan-Africanism is Africa-centered in scope. It can be read as the result of a decolonial framework based on African understandings of the person as a social being.

Personhood, in most African cultures, is determined by one's belonging to a community. This is the sense of the concept of Ubuntu, "being self through others," expressed by the Zulu saying "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" or the Wolof "nit niteey garabam," conveying the very nature of being as connected to a community.

1 In *Epistemologies From the Global South: Negritude, Modernity and the Idea of Africa*, Cheikh Thiam argues that African art is philosophy not because it expresses a certain philosophy but because the rhythms, colors and volumes it produces are an articulation of a philosophical knowledge. It is in this sense that African philosophy must be understood, not as a discourse, but as a praxis that is, as much as theory, an articulation of a philosophical discourse.

2 Blyden uses this concept to describe the essential attributes of Africans.

In these societies, the so-called “slave” (jaam in Wolof) is not a person. They are the non-social being per excellence. What makes the slave a non-social being is not, however, the fact that they are owned and objectified; it is rather the fact that they do not have kin. It is from this conception of personhood that one can understand the meaning of “Africa” as conceived by the first Africans. What happens when the Europeans capture people on the mainland of the African continent and start the institution of slavery is that these new Africans, who did not think of themselves as Africans but rather as Dogon, Igbo, Diola, etc., were cognizant that rupture from one’s community implied social death. They understood, thus, the need to reinvent a community that would save them from social death and ensure their ultimate freedom. That is precisely why they invented “Africa” as the place that ensures the former Yoruba, Wolof, and Zulu, etc., continued belonging to a community. Given the endogenous understanding of the slave as a kinless subject, this invention of “Africa” and the conception of all Africans as members of a newly invented community, would guarantee the permanent freedom of these new world Africans, whose kin extends from that moment on, to all places where African descendants can be located. In this sense, the invention of Africa is consubstantial to that of Pan-Africanism and the diaspora. It is the ultimate moment of resistance against transforming enslaved Africans into de-subjectified slaves.

It is arguable, for all the reasons mentioned above, that Pan-Africanism functions at the same time as a political and epistemic stand that offers new meanings to the concept of “Africa,” the dehumanization of which constitutes the condition of possibility of coloniality. Put simply, what is at stake in the becoming African of the enslaved Sereer, Bambara, and Bete through the invention of an imagined conceptual space called “Africa” is the consciousness of the necessity of an epistemic stance that underscores the need to reach out across ethnic lines to “delink” from the pervasive conceptual frameworks founded on the dehumanization and exploitation of the other—especially non-white and non-human beings. This epistemic stance resonates with later Africa-centered thinking, such as Cheikh Anta Diop’s representation of Africa as the cradle of civilization (Diop, 1967, 1981), the Afrocentric school’s theories of the necessity to engage with the world from our particular cultural location, the Rastafarian and Pan-Africanist dreams, and numerous Africanists’ engagements against modernity/coloniality.

## The Haitian Revolution, Pan-Africanism, and Epistemic Freedom

The institution of slavery is not the only pre-20<sup>th</sup> century pivotal moment leading to the birth of Pan-Africanism as an epistemic stand that attempts to delink from the universalizing framework of Euro-Modernity. While it illustrates late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century manifestations of the first Pan-African engagements inscribed in a dialectics of belonging, other instances of Pan-African engagement, such as the Haitian revolution, are equally important pivotal moments. The Haitian

revolution illustrates a new phase of Pan-African engagement in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As opposed to the traditional reading of the Haitian revolution as a dialectical struggle of the “Master” and the “Bondsman” led by Toussaint Louverture (a literate slave born in the colony and striving to reap the modern promise of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity for all), we postulate that, an analysis of the revolution that centers the Voodoo priest Boukman in order to read the

meaning of the Haitian revolution shows that it can be read as a Pan-African intervention that functions as a radical epistemic stand. This perspective is even more defensible if it is read in light of the ethnic composition of Santa Domingo by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1791, two-thirds of the island's population were born on the African continent. These "Africans" who were organized around ethnic lines in the earlier days of the colony, had, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, developed a cross-ethnic (Pan-African) community on the plantation and in maroon communities. (Bellegarde-Smith & Michel, 2006; Desmangles, 1992; Du Bois, 2004, 2012; Ramsey, 2014; Trouillot, 1995; Nisbett, 2015). Their gathering at the Bois Caiman ceremony, as well as other secret punctual and/or spontaneous meetings-usually hidden from their slave masters, and hence rarely accounted for-is a continuation and development of this Pan-African solidarity led by people of African descent who were born on the continent and therefore centered on endogenous African conceptions of freedom and community.

The representation of the Haitian revolution as an epistemic stand is arguable in that Boukman, the major leader of the movement, born in the Senegambian region, was a Voodoo priest. He was, thus, an African knowledge master, capable of questioning the very modes of definition of the world that enabled the subaltern condition of people of African descent. Rather than engaging in a dialectic similar to Hegel's standoff between the Master and the Bondsman, Boukman's revolution is an Africa-centered stand based on the critique of Western modes of engaging the world and a celebration of African epistemologies. The starting point of the ceremony of Bois Caiman that he led is particularly meaningful and telling. It was a Voodoo ceremony that questions the epistemic foundations of the Euro-Modern tradition illustrated by a strong and radical critique of the "White God," the valorization of African knowledge (the community's sacrifice of an animal, some say a pig), and the embrace of the ethic of community taught by African religious practices. Boukman declares, in this vein:

[...] This God who made the sun, who brings us light from above, who raises the sea, and who makes the storm rumble. That God is there, do you understand? Hiding in a cloud, He watches us, he sees all that the whites do! The God of the whites pushes them to crime, but he wants us to do good deeds. But the God who is so good orders us to vengeance. He will direct our hands, and give us help. Throw away the image of the God of the whites who thirsts for our tears. Listen to the liberty that speaks in all our hearts (Dubois & Garrigus, 2006, p. 88).

Boukman's prayers is clearly an instance of writing the Pan-African national narrative (CLR James, 2012) not only through a provincialization of modern ethics but also through the promise of ethical social strata based on African metaphysics rather than the ethics of domination represented by the "God of the whites." The emphasis on sacrificing the animal as a way of connecting these new Africans to African metaphysics and religious practices is particularly symbolic. It marks a statement of spiritual equality if not spiritual superiority with the Christian God in a time when our belief in non-Christian deities determined the mark of African inferiority. Moreover, the centrality of Voodoo presupposes a completely different worldview based on African modes of engaging the world. This epistemic stand is particularly important in that the Euro-Modern invention of "Africa" as the 'country' where the sun never sets is inseparable from the relegation of African ontologies, epistemologies, and metaphysics to an inferior state of human development. Voodoo is, in the Euro-Modern logic, the site of African irrationality, backwardness, and decadence. Centering it in this Pan-African project and making

it the vector of African redemption is reminiscent of the Pan-African theories of Negritude scholars who find in African metaphysics, the possibility to celebrate Pan-African humanity and to critique the limits of the colonial matrix of power (Tageldin, 2014; Thiam, 2023) It is in this sense that one can understand Césaire's famous celebration of "Haiti, où la Négritude se mit debout pour la première fois." (1983, p. 24).

This Africa-centered reading of the Haitian revolution as one of the pivotal moments of Pan-Africanism provides us with the possibility to frame the movement as a radically anti-colonial perspective. In this sense, although it is a counter-discourse of modernity, Pan-Africanism embraces African agency and escapes the logic that Euro-modernity is the only way of manifesting meaningful presence in the world. It is precisely the Africa-centered epistemologies derived from Boukman's representation of Africans that leads to the theories of African personality and the Pan-African political states developed by the pioneers of Pan-Africanism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## (De)colonial Knowledge, African Personality, and African Futures

The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century marks another pivotal moment in the history of Pan-Africanism that illustrates that it is fundamentally an epistemic and intellectual project. While the analysis of first encounters with Euro-Modernity and groundbreaking instances of African self-affirmation such as the Haitian revolution that we propose show that the Pan-Africanist engagement functioned as a praxis. The manifestations of Pan-Africanism take a different turn in this period as African descendants develop, for the first time, clearly articulated reflections on the African personality and the future of Africa, although they do not yet use the term Pan-Africanism. The most prominent of these pioneers are James Africanus Horton, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Martin Delany, and Edward Wilmot Blyden. They occupy more or less ambivalent positions as they understood the limits of Euro-Modernity; believed in the impossibility of Black progress in a World that is not prepared to host them; and were conscious of the necessity to create Pan-African social and political structures that were based on African epistemologies and that were geared towards the betterment of Africans' conditions worldwide. It is on these ambivalent grounds that the pioneers of Pan-Africanism set the theoretical foundations of the Pan-African Movement, developed the concept of African personality and clearly articulated the necessity of an African state that will accommodate Africans worldwide. These theories constitute the foundations of what, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, develops into a full-fledged movement.

The story of Edward Wilmot Blyden, a brilliant young man from St. Thomas, frequently presented as the pioneer of Pan-Africanism, is a good example of these first intellectual articulations of Pan-Africanism. When, in 1850, Blyden decided to migrate to the United States, it was to fulfill his dream of becoming an ordained minister. He, therefore, applied to Rutgers Theological College in the hope of furthering his education. However, upon arriving in the United States, the young pupil was denied admission because of his race. Undeterred by this rejection and with the encouragement of John Knox, the pastor of the integrated Dutch Reform Church in St. Thomas, Blyden continued his pursuit of education and persisted in seeking an institution of higher education that would give him

a chance. Unfortunately, he faced a similar fate on two other occasions. He was denied admission because he was of Afro-descendant. This series of rejections served as the catalyst for Blyden's return to Africa to seek education. Following the advice of John Pinney and Walter Lowrie, who convinced him to continue his education in Liberia, Blyden embarked for Monrovia in 1851, where, the same year, he enrolled at Alexander High School. Blyden's return to Africa to pursue higher education denied to people of African descent in the Americas led him to become a teacher, university professor, higher education administrator, and ultimately the president of Liberia College in 1881.

The story of Blyden's return to Africa and the development of his political and intellectual career is a literal and symbolic take on the very nature of Pan-Africanism. Who else is better fit to theorize the possibility of an African political unit that would solve African problems than someone who was denied the possibility to attend college because of his race? It is from this political and epistemic location that Blyden theorizes what will ultimately become the foundations of the 20th-century Pan-African Movement: "African personality" and a federal African state founded on African socio-political realities rearticulated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the cultural unity of Africa and the United States of Africa.

Blyden's theory of African personality (Lynch, 1971) must be read in light of his critique of the hierarchization of races that legitimizes slavery and colonization and that is, in 1963, strongly supported by the Anthropological Society of London in its pledge to support the colonial expansion. Blyden's theory, one of the foundations of the Pan-African philosophical tradition, is particularly ambivalent as it reiterates, on the one hand, the racialism of Arthur Gobineau and rejects, on the other, its corollary, the hierarchical conception of races. For Blyden, racial purity is necessary and beneficial to the world. It allows each race to fulfill its destiny and participate in advancing our humanity (Odamtten, 2019). Blyden argues, thus, for the necessity to keep the vibrance of African cultures threatened by the forces of coloniality and white supremacy. He ironically states: "Let us do away with our African personality and be lost, if possible, in another Race.' This is as wise or as philosophical as to say; let us do away with gravitation, with heat and cold and sunshine and rain" (Lynch, p. 87). For Blyden, this is all the truer in that Africans have a natural relation to the world that he calls: "African personality." The "African personality" is based partly on nature and culture. Starting from the postulation that geography and environment have a direct effect on behavior, he opposes Africans' temperament and rural tendencies to Europe's brutality and argues that each race has the duty to preserve their particularities in the world. Each race, he declares, "has developed for itself such a system or code of life as its environment has suggested" (Lynch, p. 10). In this sense, Africans are, he shows, given their environmental location, spiritual, communalist, and eco-friendly (Lynch, 1967). This perspective, an antithetical engagement with Euro-Modernity developed in contradistinction to the idea of the primacy of the subject and the supremacy of Euro-Modern rationality, is precisely what will, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, be reiterated as one of the major principles of Pan-Africanism: the cultural unity of Africa.

Blyden's theory of the African personality is not, however, a simple, anthropological take on the cultural unity of Africa that became, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the foundations of the Pan-African Movement. It is mainly a strong epistemic take that questions the pervasiveness of White Supremacy as a threat to the African

personality. He argues in the first pages of *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1994), the limits of an education system that is founded on the principles of European superiority. Such an education system threatens the genius of the African and risks inventing a race of people destined to imitate what they are not and condemned to be outside the train of history. More than 150 years before the decolonial scholar's articulation of the concept of "epistemicide," Blyden states, "the slavery of the mind is far more destructive than that of the body" (Ayandele, 1966, p. 245). It is in this vein that he calls for what he names "Spiritual decolonization," an epistemic stand that invites Africans to delink from the centralization of the Western subject and that of the subject of the West. Thus, Blyden theorizes, in his inaugural address as president of Liberia College, the importance of developing Africa-centered knowledge free from the grip of Euro-Modernity. He states:

[...] Now in Africa, where the color of the majority is black, the fashion in personal matters is naturally suggested by the personal characteristics of the race, and we are free from the necessity of submitting to the use of "incongruous feathers awkwardly stuck on." Still, we are held in bondage by our indiscriminate and injudicious use of a foreign literature; and we strive to advance by the methods of a foreign race. In this effort we struggle with the odds against us. We fight at the disadvantage which David would have experienced in Saul's armor. The African must advance by methods of his own. He must possess a power distinct from that of the European. It has been proven that he knows how to take advantage of European culture, and that he can be benefited by it. This proof was perhaps necessary, but it is not sufficient. We must show that we are able to go alone, to carve out our own way. We must not be satisfied that in this nation European influence shapes our polity, makes our laws, rules in our tribunals, and impregnates our social atmosphere. We must not suppose that the Anglo-Saxon methods are final, that there is nothing for us to find out for our own guidance, and that we have nothing to teach the world. There is inspiration for us also. We must study our brethren in the interior, who know better than we do the laws of growth for the race. We see among them the rudiments of that which, with fair play and opportunity, will develop into important and effective agencies for our work. We look too much to foreigners, and are dazzled almost to blindness by their exploits, so as to fancy that they have exhausted the possibilities of humanity. In our estimation they, like Longfellow's lagoon, have done and can do everything better than anybody else (1882, p. 11).

All the ingredients for the birth and development of the Pan-African Movement are present in this inaugural lecture. But more interestingly and more relevantly in this forum is Blyden's understanding, as early as 1881, of the centrality of knowledge production and dissemination in the Pan-African project and the necessity to conceptualize the future of people of African descent from an Africa-centered perspective. In this sense, Blyden's life and philosophy is another important moment in the history of the development of the Pan-African Movement that illustrates that it is fundamentally an epistemological stand constituting the foundation of a cultural and a political project.

## Epistemic Relevance and the Institutionalization of Pan-Africanism

The Pan-Africanist tradition has a strong history of promoting political education and knowledge production. While in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, knowledge production in this tradition takes the form of a *philopraxis* that foregrounds the



birth and development of the movement, 19th-century “proto-Pan-Africanists” such as Edward Wilmot Blyden clearly theorized the necessity to center African epistemologies. The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries build on this tradition to articulate and systematize the Pan-African Movement. This is materialized in the organization of conferences and cultural festivals, the establishment of journals and newspapers, and the creation of academic institutions that constitute the pillars on which the movement is built.

The centralization of knowledge production and African epistemologies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century systematization of Pan-Africanism is illustrated by the importance of the Pan-African conferences and congresses organized between 1900 and 1945. These spaces of knowledge production function as barometers for the development of the movement, the birth of which is frequently tied to the first Pan-African conference organized by Sylvester Williams in 1900. They were, arguably, political as well as academic events where delegates read papers dealing with the meaning, nature, and conception of Africa, the social, political and economic conditions of people of African descent, the value and possibility of liberty, and the role and impact of coloniality in the lives of African descendants worldwide. Some of the participants of the conference are major Global African scholars. W.E.B Du Bois, one of the major leaders of the congresses, is one of the most prominent scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is worthy to note, for instance, the fact that the excerpt from the book, “the problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the problem of the color line,” one of the most cited references in the discipline of Africana Studies, was first used in the “Address to the Nations of the World,” the resolution of the conference, drafted by Du Bois and signed by all delegates.

The centrality of knowledge production in the history of Pan-Africanism and its systematization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is equally demonstrated by numerous state-sponsored festivals that were organized to contribute to the epistemic foundations of the movement, participate in the re-presentation of the “idea of Africa,” and conceptualize and support the Pan-African tradition. The First World Festival of Negro Art organized in Dakar in 1966, the Second World Festival of Negro Art in Lagos, in 1977, and the First Pan-African Cultural Festival hosted in Algiers in 1969, organized respectively by Leopold Sedar Senghor, Olusegun Obasanjo and Houari Boumédiène, and supported by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and UNESCO, were important moments showing the primacy of knowledge production in the history of Pan-Africanism. Political in scope, these festivals were organized around symposia, plenary sessions, and films asking fundamental questions about the meaning of “Africa” and the nature of African freedom. The First World Festival of Negro Arts, for example, featured major artists and intellectuals from the entire continent and the diaspora and ensured what T. Jaji, M. Munro, and D. Murphy calls “The Performance of Pan-Africanism” (2019). The 1969 conference of Algiers remains, to date, one of the most important moments in the history of African studies. There is a consensus in the discipline that it marks the veritable shift to Postcolonial African studies as it is the moment when Negritude was announced dead. The announcement of the death of Negritude at this conference was, for Samuel D. Anderson, a performance of the African revolution (Anderson, 1969) For all these reasons, it is arguable that knowledge production and reflections on the meaning and political destiny of Global Africa were essential in the Pan-African tradition. To reach this goal, the precursors of the movement, bet on Pan-African events that were essentially academic.

In addition to conferences and cultural festivals, academic journals and newspapers are central to acknowledging, creating and disseminating of knowledge produced by the Pan-African Movement. Using these fora as tools to raise African people's political consciousness ensures that Pan-African masses exercise their agency and question Euro-Modern means of production of knowledge that led to the negation of African knowledge systems. It is even arguable that the entire history of the movement can be told from the perspective of these journals. Their goals were not only to create an outlet where knowledge production by and for Africans could be developed but also decolonized. The particularities of many Pan-African journals were not only to produce rigorous scientific knowledge but also to conceptualize Global Africans' presence in the world from an Africa-centered perspective. One of the most important manifestations of this tradition is the journal *Présence Africaine*, founded by Alioune Diop in 1947. This journal, as its name suggests, questions the exclusion of people of African descent in the history of knowledge production and the tradition that kept the knowledge on Africa in academic and colonial anthropologists' circles. In the spirit of Pan-Africanism, *Présence Africaine bridges* disciplines and worlds. Widely circulated, it is read by specialists in African studies as well as non-specialists and Pan-African masses. Its first issue, for example, republished an article written by Edward Wilmot Blyden and featured Jean-Paul Sartre's political philosophy, Leopold Sedar Senghor's poetry, Birago Diop's creative work, and a critical essay on the limit of White Supremacy authored by Hughes Panassie. (Hassan, 1999) In other occurrences, it directly covered Pan-African political events. Volume 1 and 2 of the 1959 issues, for example, focused on the *Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists*, thereby showing that it is, at the same time, a political, intellectual, and cultural forum. The *Negro World*, the journal of the United Negro Improvement Association, published between 1918 and 1933, functioned similarly. It is a perfect example of establishing traditional academic fora to engage in Pan-African education and knowledge production. It published articles that promoted Pan-African consciousness to its members. Its publications are still relevant for specialists of Africana studies. Along the same lines, the *Accra Evening News*, founded in 1949, was the mouthpiece of Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party's attempts to expose Africans to Pan-African consciousness and the history of Africa. It continues the Pan-African tradition's use of print media to advance its philosophy and to expose Global African people to Pan-African Consciousness. This is emphasized in the *Accra Evening News* with articles, editorials, illustrations and opinions about Pan-Africanism, Socialism and the realization of a united Africa beyond the limits of a free Ghana.

In the same vein as Conferences, cultural festivals, and academic and political journals, the importance of knowledge production in the Pan-African tradition is manifested in the creation of academic institutions that participate in centering African knowledge, such as the Institute of African Studies at Legon, Accra and The Dar es Salaam School of African History. For example, the opening of the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana is a clear engagement to use tertiary institutions to promote a Pan-African epistemic stand. At the inauguration of the IAS in 1963, Kwame Nkrumah encouraged students and fellows to view their charge as one that is fundamentally concerned with decolonizing knowledge production for African people at home and abroad.

Sixty years on the IAS is still the site of Pan-African education. This is demonstrated through research, community events, conferences and teaching. The Dar es Salaam

School of African History in the late 1960s and early 1970s echoed Nkrumah's project. It became the site of social reproduction and liberatory education and home to some of the most renowned Pan-Africanists. During this period, the Dar es Salaam school was challenging, re-thinking, re-writing, learning and re-conceptualizing African history (Campbell, 1991). It shifted the role of higher education in Africa. This fervour for an African-led Pan-African Epistemic Stand has reverberated throughout the last five decades since the school's opening. Plys states:

The Dar School can be characterized by five principles for historical methods: (a) Opposed to viewing pre-colonial history as static and "primitive" they instead depict precolonial political economy as advanced, dynamic, and well-organized; (b) Centers local agency in the depiction of anti-colonial movements; (c) Looks to Global South theory and philosophy such as Cabral, Fanon, and Guevara to analyze anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements; (d) Centers the role of anti-colonial trade unions independent from European political parties as the driving force in anti-colonial movements; (e) Critiques post-independence leaders and elites as upholding colonial class structures (Rodney termed this new phase of capitalist exploitation "flag independence") while also acknowledging the key role elites played in national independence movements (Plys, 2023, p. 100).

The Dar es Salaam School of African History is much more than a brick-and-mortar school. It is more of a philosophy and intellectual trajectory that centers African people as subjects of their liberation. The school extended beyond the academy but also engaged with other sectors of society that were anti-colonial and prepared to develop a new Africa starting at the Dar es Salaam School of African History. It is, therefore, not surprising that it is in this school that Walter Rodney wrote *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972). His contributions to Pan-African Epistemology are undeniable. It is a staple reading for African studies departments, revolutionary organizations and individuals who embrace a Pan-African ideology.

Pan-African epistemologies have evolved primarily in institutions aimed at researching, creating and disseminating African-centered and liberatory knowledge. Journals, newspapers, conferences and tertiary institutions are among a few of the many institutions the Pan-African Movement has utilized as a vehicle to engage in a consciousness-raising project.

## Global Africa and the contemporary relevance of Pan-Africanism

This special issue needs to be read as a continuation of the four hundred years of Pan-African engagement with knowledge production and Global African epistemologies. From the first encounter with Euro-Modernity to the decolonization movements, Haitian Revolution, 19<sup>th</sup> century returnees' movement, and contemporary cultural and intellectual movements, the Pan-African tradition has attempted to create a space to reckon with the continuities and discontinuities of African-descended peoples' lives as we engage in a process of African integration and liberation. As a movement that has traditionally centered African modes of definitions of the world, it offers the possibility to question the foundations of coloniality. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the African Union, the most recent institutional declination of the

Pan-African project, is an occasion for us to revisit the epistemic relevance of Pan-Africanism at a time when the increased consciousness of the pervasiveness of coloniality has led to a growing call for decolonialization.

This special issue of *Global Africa on Pan-African Research Agenda and Global Futures* is therefore relevant in that it has the potential to create the conditions for a radical engagement with some of the most critical global issues that our world faces today, namely, the pervasiveness of coloniality, the threats of the global matrix of power, and the unremitting demand for political liberation globally. The contributors of this issue explore the ways in which Pan-Africanism has historically rhythmized the research agenda, intellectual priorities, and heuristic postures in Africa, the African Diaspora, and globally. They also look carefully at how the Pan-African tradition can be a source of innovation and disruption as we engage with global governance, racism, anti-blackness, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and social justice in order to help redraw the possibilities of a world increasingly shaped by discourses promoting nativism, isolationism, and hostile attacks on multiculturalism.

This issue opens with a set of articles addressing the questions of individual liberties, inclusion, and Pan-African priorities. In the first article of the issue, “Queering’ Africa through homo inclusion africanus: A reading of Osvalde Lewat’s *Les Aquatiques*, Pan-African Grand Prize for Literature,” Patrick Hervé Moneyang and Charles Gueboguo offer an analysis of the complex relationship between individual rights, LGBTQI+ questions, and Pan-Africanism. Through a groundbreaking analysis of Lewat’s text and the implications of the African Union’s decision to award the Grand Prize for Literature to a queer novel, Moneyang and Gueboguo revisit Pan-Africanism in light of a queer and inclusive framework they call *homo inclusio africanus*. This framework, they argue, opens the possibility to “queer” the idea of Africa and the concept of Pan-Africanism, thereby creating the possibility of the emergence of indocile Pan-African subjects able to reach their full potential in a continent that is ready to celebrate its pluriversal voices. This text offers the possibility to read Pan-Africanism as a political force that allows us to limit the negative consequences of homophobia, one of the most critical issues on the continent, and create the conditions to secure all Africans’ lives and avoid the possible mass murder of queer Africans.

Nathanaël Assam Otya echoes Moneyang and Gueboguo’s call for an ethics of inclusion in “Prospective analytique du binôme Panafricanisme-Peuples Autochtones Pygmées d’Afrique.” Otya starts with the observation that even though the Pan-African Movement is rooted in a critique of essentialism, its project for the advancement of African peoples has failed to include minority African populations such as the autochthonous peoples of central Africa. This exclusion of the pygmy from the Pan-Africanist project is the most direct consequence of the specter of coloniality that the Pan-African tradition has been unable to escape. Thus, rather than the Euro-centric developmentalist framework that has threatened Pygmies inclusion, Otya proposes, to revisit Pan-Africanism in light of Nkrumah’s Consciencism and endogenous Pygmy epistemologies. Such a perspective will allow us, he argues, to think of African futures and the future of pygmies in a more inclusive and positive light.

The second set of articles grapples with the multifaceted particularities of Pan-Africanism through the critical analysis of the lives of key Pan-African figures such as Joseph Murumbi and Joseph Ki-Zerbo. Marian Nur Goni’s “A termite’s work:”

Rereading the pan-African dimension of Joseph Murumbi's heritage" (1911-1990), for instance, delves into the possibility of thinking about the different modes of articulating the history of research on Pan-Africanism through the study of Joseph Murumbi's life story of decolonial and Pan-Africanist engagement. The article contends ultimately that the life of this lesser-known figure of Pan-Africanism invites us to search for the meaning of the movement outside of the traditional routes. This careful study of the life of Joseph Murumbi illustrates the diversity of the Pan-African Movement, which is better understood if it is read at the conflation of African, Asian, and European histories. In "Joseph Ki-Zerbo and the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education: A Pan-African Story of Self Recovery," Chikouna Cisse exposes Ki Zerbo's role in the history of the creation of the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education. This text is, at the same time, a celebration of Joseph Ki Zerbo, one of the pioneers of contemporary African history and a pretext to showcase one of the most important Pan-African institutions on the continent whose story remains to be told.

Unlike Marian Nur Goni and Chikouna Cisse, Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang and Elizabeth Osei read African literature from an Afrofuturist perspective in a witty article entitled "Nnedi Okorafor's African Futures, Sankofa, and the Echoes of Pan-Africanism." The careful reading of Nnedi Okorafor's *Zahrah the Windseeker* (2005), *Binti* (2015), and *Remote Control* (2021) that they offer allows them to argue that Okorafor consistently reappropriates African cultural motifs to rewrite the aesthetics of African speculative fiction. For this reason, Okorafor's Pan-African aesthetics is rooted in "traditional African philosophy, lifestyles, experiences, and modes of being that cut across diverse African identities." It is, therefore, a distinct aesthetics that is better captured by the concept of Africanfuturism rather than that of Afrofuturism.

The third set of articles focuses on contemporary meanings and manifestations of Pan-Africanism. In *African Social Activism and The Rise of Neo Pan-Africanism: A look at the UPEC Summit*, Bamba Ndiaye's argues that Francophone Africa is the site of the rebirth and revival of 21<sup>st</sup> century Pan-Africanism. This new phase of the movement that he calls Neo Pan-Africanism is marked by a strong critique of the post-colonial state with a focus on good governance and a rejection of neocolonialism. Neo Pan-Africanism is also particularly groundbreaking, Ndiaye suggests, in that although it is a continuation of the earlier Pan-African project, it also centers contemporary issues such as ecological justice, feminism, and culture, etc.

Alioune Fall's article "The Pitfalls of (Anti)Essentialism: Pan-Africanism, Afropolitanism, and Global Blackness" closes this special issue with an interesting take on the limits and potential of Pan-Africanism. Fall interrogates Gilroy's critique of Pan-Africanism as an essentialist movement and contends, instead, that a careful reading of W.E.B. Du Bois' work has the potential to show the nuances of the Pan-African Movement beyond a conversation about race. As a Matter of fact, he shows, Du Bois' conception of Pan-Africanism prepares contemporary conception of African presence in the modern world such as the Afropolitan and Afrofuturist traditions.

The particular readings of Pan-Africanism that the contributors propose here shows that it is a multifaceted epistemic project that is still relevant. While it is legitimate to ask if there truly is anything left that scholars might add to two centuries of Pan-Africanist discourses on the meaning, relevance, prospects, and

challenges of the movement, this special issue on Pan-Africanism is particularly timely in that, as an epistemic stand, it can allow us to rethink Africa's presence in contemporary processes of production of knowledge in light of recent African intellectual interventions such as Afropolitanism, Afrofuturism, and the Afro-chic, and in conversation with new intellectual approaches such as the postcolonial and decolonial options.

This special issue is all the more relevant in that it has the potential to create the conditions for a radical engagement with some of the most critical global issues that our world faces today, namely, the pervasiveness of coloniality, the threats of climate change and environmental justice, and the unremitting demand for individual rights globally. One can even argue that it offers a possibility to explore the challenges and unprecedented opportunities of the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution, the rapid development of artificial intelligence, the growing importance of transhumanism, and the primacy of the Anthropocene, all of which redraw the limits of our existence, question the very nature of life and threaten the future of our planet.

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