



Rethinking the Pan-African Agenda: Africa, the African Diaspora and the Agenda for Liberation¹

Moses Khisa*

Abstract

The original Pan-African *ideal* had, as its programmatic agenda, the struggle to free Africans in the diaspora from slave bondage and to liberate the African continent from the despicable occupation by European imperial powers. This article revisits this agenda for liberation, placing it in the current crisis of globalisation and examining the continued marginal place of Africa in the global capitalist political economy. The article sketches out the genealogy and contours of the liberation agenda that looped the African diaspora to developments on the African continent, dating back to the antislavery struggles at the end of the eighteenth century through to the era of independent Africa. I argue that the highest point of the liberation agenda, the final defeat of apartheid in South Africa, ironically coincided with the deepening of Africa's place on the lowest rungs of the global capitalist system. Today, globalisation has fastened rather than loosened Africa's position on the ladder of the global political economy. To push back against Africa's continued marginal position perforce requires returning to the original motivation of the Pan-African agenda and *ideal*: the unity of purpose and collective action of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora for radical liberation.

Keywords: African diaspora, Pan-Africanism, liberation struggle, globalisation

Résumé

Initialement, L'*idéal* panafricain avait, comme agenda programmatique, la lutte pour libérer les Africains de la diaspora de l'esclavage et pour libérer le continent africain de l'occupation méprisable des puissances impériales européennes. Cet article revisite ce programme de libération par rapport à la crise actuelle de la mondialisation et en examinant la place toujours marginale

* Assistant Professor of Political Science and Africana Studies, North Carolina State University, USA. E-mail: mkhisa@ncsu.edu

de l'Afrique dans l'économie politique capitaliste mondiale. L'article esquisse la généalogie et les contours de l'agenda de libération qui a lié la diaspora africaine aux développements sur le continent africain, qui remonte aux luttes anti-esclavagistes de la fin du XVIII^e siècle jusqu'à l'ère de l'Afrique indépendante. Nous soutenons que le point culminant du programme de libération, la défaite finale de l'apartheid en Afrique du Sud, a ironiquement coïncidé avec l'aggravation de la place de l'Afrique sur les échelons les plus bas du système capitaliste mondial. Aujourd'hui, la mondialisation a plutôt enfermé que relâché la position de l'Afrique à l'échelle de l'économie politique mondiale. Pour combattre la position marginale de l'Afrique, il faut revenir à la motivation initiale de l'agenda et de l'*idéal* panafricains : la vision commune et l'action collective des Africains sur le continent et dans la diaspora pour une libération radicale.

Mots-clés : Diaspora africaine, panafricanisme, lutte de libération, mondialisation.

Introduction

Africa remains the downtrodden continent of the world. In all indicators and indices, the continent occupies the lowest rungs of global development, hegemonic control and power hierarchies. For the most part, Africa's internal and external relations remain largely conditioned by interests and forces that are not for or of the African people. This is not to say that Africa is merely a passive player in the world, only acted on; it is not to gainsay African agency. Rather, it is to underscore the continent's continued marginal status.

The peripheral position of Africa in the structures of world politics, and the socioeconomic plight of African people, both at home and around the world – the African diaspora, writ large – underlines the enduring relevance of the agenda for liberation and the emancipatory politics that historically connected the continent with its diaspora. The liberation of Africa and its diaspora from the shackles of racist exploitation was the founding programmatic agenda of the Pan-African movement, dating back to the pioneering resistance of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the emergence of a radical 'black international', starting with 'the Black Jacobins' of San Domingo – Haiti (West and Martin 2009: 1; James 1989).

The Pan-African *ideal*, and the movements and activists it spawned, were historically concerned in some way with the social and political emancipation of African peoples and those of the African diaspora (Adi and Sherwood 2003: vii). Its transnational agenda sought to shape African's place and standing in the direction of liberation and the restoration of Black dignity that had been stripped away by the evil trade in Africans – slavery.

Therefore, pan-Africanism represented Black fraternal solidarity and the liberation of African peoples who were historically dispersed around the globe and on the continent. The ultimate goal of Pan-African thinking and activism was the creation of a 'genuinely united and independent Africa as the basis for the liberation of all Africans, both those on the continent and in the diaspora' (Adi 2018: 3). It was in this regard that independent African leaders, most notably Kwame Nkrumah, worked hard to forge a unified continent as an existential necessity, both material and ideological.

Pan-Africanism was the intellectual and ideological movement for the liberation of African peoples everywhere (Abdul-Raheem 1996: 1). It was born in the diaspora and out of adversity. This is worth emphasis, but not to reaffirm the thinking among sections of the early Pan-African activists in the United States who believed they were enlightened enough to return to Africa as messiahs and saviours to liberate or civilise 'savage' Africans (Tillery 2011: 14). Rather, it is to underline the critical roles played by the African diasporic community, over centuries, since the time of enslavement in the Americas and the transnational resistance to external assaults on Africa through the colonial project and the struggles for African liberation. As Thandika Mkandawire noted, 'historically, when Africa has embarked on a clear project such as national liberation or the end of apartheid, Africa's diasporas have responded magnificently, even when burdened by their own oppressive conditions' (Mkandawire 2005: 9).

The constant engagements and entanglements between the African continent and its vast diasporas have historically been pivotal to the making and unmaking of developments in the motherland (Akyeampong 2000; Zeleza 2010). Moreover, the struggles for economic emancipation and political liberation in the diaspora have been historically intimately linked to the parallel quest for reclaiming Africa's place in the global political economy, something that has become more acute in our time, in the current era of seemingly unbounded globalism.

The central thrust and the initial motivation of the Pan-African movement, drawing from the Pan-African philosophy and ideal, was to reclaim Black dignity in concrete terms and restore the material sovereign existence of the African continent. The realisation of this programme of struggle remains patently elusive today and beckons for a renewed Pan-African commitment and imagination. Thus, seen through a *longue-durée* lens, today's problems fall squarely on a centuries-long grid. It is through revisiting the Pan-African *ideal* that we can locate the unity of purpose that links Africa and its diasporas as well as the mutual problems germane to the continent and Africans in the diaspora.

The resistance against enslavement and the struggle for freedom from bondage in the Americas and the Caribbean date back to the horrors of the Middle Passage, and in due course of time were tied to resistance against incipient imperial occupation of the continent in the second half of the nineteenth century (Gomez 2019; Falola 2013; Zeleza 2010; Okpewho, Davies and Mazrui 2009; Harris 1993). The key early pioneers of the Pan-African agenda were concerned not only with exploitation and oppression in the diaspora but also with plunder and despoliation in the continent of Africa (Abdul-Raheem 1996: 2; Mazrui 2005: 57). It is instructive that when the Pan-African movement took a firm organisational form at the turn of the twentieth century, with the convening of the first Pan-African conference in London under the initial leadership of Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams, to be followed later with a series of congresses spearheaded by W. E. B. Du Bois, the primary objective was to highlight colonial injustices and the oppression of the colonised peoples under occupation both in the African continent and the Caribbean (Adi 2018: 20).

This programmatic commitment became the leitmotif of the series of Pan-African congresses that were convened in the United States and Europe after the First World War. The final push that kickstarted Africa's political independence gained momentum from the Fifth Pan-African Congress convened in Manchester, England, in 1945. It was attended by some of the luminaries of the independence movement – Kwame Nkrumah from the Gold Coast, Nnamdi Azikiwe from Nigeria, and Jomo Kenyatta from Kenya, among others (Adi and Sherwood 1995; Mazrui 2005).

This article revisits the Pan-African *ideal* and the attendant agenda for liberation, an agenda that is urgently necessary today as Africa remains trapped in global marginality. The article argues that the unity of purpose between Africa and its diaspora peoples, which formed a formidable front and contributed immensely to the struggle against colonial occupation of the continent and racial injustice abroad, has for the most part been betrayed or at a minimum given lip-service by successive generations of African rulers and the continental body, the African Union (AU), and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity. While the AU has played and continues to play a pivotal role in aggregating African agency on the global scene (Edozie and Khisa 2022), it has fallen short of aggressively pushing and advancing the Pan-African agenda for liberation.

The rest of this article proceeds in three major sections. The next section maps out the genealogy of Pan-Africanism, situating it in the painful experiences of enslavement in the New World. The article then reappraises the socioeconomic status of Africa in a globalised, capitalist hegemonic

world. The penultimate section addresses the contemporary failure to sustain, and in fact the betrayal of, the original Pan-African *ideal*, followed by a brief conclusion.

The Genealogy of Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism, both as an idea and a practice, was born in the diaspora and out of adversity. It has its origins in the struggle for freedom among the enslaved and colonised Africans in the Americas, the Caribbean and on the African continent (Ackah 2016: 16). Out of the tragedy of enslavement came the men and women who stood up against the overtly racist and deplorable slave economy in the Americas and the Caribbean. It was they who authored and pursued the pan-African agenda – the agenda for liberation. The leading pioneers had either direct experience of enslavement or had been born to slave parents (Soyinka et al. 2015: 120). To take but one example, Frederick Douglass – born to a slave mother – took up the challenge of abolition, becoming one of the earliest figures in the emergence of a diaspora-based Pan-African network. The primary goal was to shake off the shackles of slave bondage and reassert the full dignity and human worth of African peoples both in the continent at home and in the diaspora (Adi 2018: 11).

The long struggle against the evil, tricontinental trade in African peoples became most pronounced in the plantation complex of the southern United States, ultimately culminating in the American Civil War that significantly shaped race relations and the broader political landscape in that country. The aftermath of the Civil War did not bring about total eradication of the legacies of racial segregation. Instead, the brief period of Reconstruction quickly gave way to the vicious Jim Crow laws and a vast regime of overt and institutionalised racial segregation, until the gains of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s.

For and Against a Return to Africa

From very early on in the slavery abolition movement, the solution to the problems caused by endemic racism in America, for many among the incipient Pan-African movement, was to emigrate back to Africa, to start a new life outside of a prejudiced and highly racialised sociopolitical environment. Paul Cuffe was a pioneering advocate of the return to Africa project, a project that was to be revived half a century later by the ambitious and charismatic Marcus Garvey (Gomez 2019; Tillery 2011). Cuffe and other early Pan-Africanists, like Martin Delany, saw high prospects for the future in returning to Africa (Tillery 2011: 16–17). Emigration was viewed as the ultimate ‘reversing sail’ (Gomez 2019).

On the other hand, opposition to the emigration project was equally forceful. From Frederick Douglass to Senator Blanche K. Bruce, many African-American activists were decidedly opposed to emigration, believing instead that the struggle to defeat racism and reclaim Black dignity had to be fought right inside American society. To them, withdrawal was not an option. After all, they contended, Black people had toiled in the slave plantations that formed the bedrock of the American economy before and after the Civil War, thereby contributing to the making of America's capitalist wealth and wellbeing. They therefore had a stake in the country as full citizens entitled to partake in the nation's prosperity.

This early cleavage and programmatic disagreement set the stage for future differences within the ranks of the African diaspora's Pan-African activists. From Paul Cuffe, Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass to Blanche K. Bruce, Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, the extent to which the diaspora's liberation agendas were to be viewed as, in the final analysis, the struggle to return to the homeland, remained a sticky issue for generations. In founding the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and its business venture, the Black Star Line, one of Garvey's key goals was to ease travel between the US and the Caribbean, on the one hand, and the mother continent, Africa, on the other (Bande 2008, 2010). Through the UNIA, Garvey built easily the biggest network and movement of Africa-originated peoples around the world, and a Black social movement of a magnitude perhaps not achieved before, and arguably not surpassed since then. Although it stumbled and ultimately folded after only three years in operation, the Black Star Line shipping company was as revolutionary as it was historic, embraced by multitudes across the United States and the Caribbean, who supported, operated and funded it during its short lifespan.

It is remarkable that close to a million US dollars was pooled in a fairly short time period, from small contributions by UNIA members, who were believed to have numbered more than two million at the peak of the organisation's mobilisation and community outreach (Tillery 2011: 49). This was the first major project of transnational economic activism that sought to empower and truly emancipate Black people in the United States and the Caribbean. The project also had the ultimate plan of connecting the diasporas to the mother continent – Africa – by easing travel and facilitating commerce. The UNIA and Garvey saw the Black Star Line as critical to the realisation of Black economic liberation and the extrication of Blacks from vicious racism and exploitative capitalism. Regrettably, Garvey's activities were met with deep suspicion and ultimately outright hostility from sections of the African-American community and especially from the

National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples (NAACP), and its leadership, including W. E. B. Du Bois (Tillery 2011: 51). Public spats between Garvey and Du Bois fuelled division and imperilled the possibility of forging a common front in the Black movement for freedom and liberation in the United States, the Caribbean, and – ultimately – the mother continent, Africa.

But the divergences in opinion and the disagreements, between Garvey and Du Bois, for example, were neither fundamental nor strictly ideological; they were largely procedural and tactical, or at any rate the result of a clash of personalities. Yet, in spite of the evident tensions and tactical disagreements among the pioneering pan-African intellectuals and leading luminaries in the diaspora in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, there was nevertheless a commitment to a radical agenda, as articulated in the works of such scholar-activists as C. L. R. James and George Padmore (James 1989; Padmore 1956). With inspiration from the radical scholarship of early twentieth-century pan-African thinkers, including Du Bois and Garvey, Africa's anticolonial and independence leaders took up the baton of unifying Africa and its diasporas in pursuit of the grand agenda of total liberation.

The resoluteness and unwavering commitment to Africa's total liberation was best captured in the activities and ideological predispositions of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere in Tanzania. Nkrumah powerfully and unequivocally insisted that the independence of his country, Ghana, was meaningless without the full liberation of the entire African continent. For his stance against imperialism and unwavering commitment to the African liberation agenda, Nkrumah ultimately paid the political price of being deposed from power in a military coup, in 1966. His single-minded focus on the agenda for African liberation was unmistakable but politically costly. Nkrumah presciently believed that Africa's fate and future rested on a continental unity of purpose and collective action in tackling the continent's pressing problems.

Nkrumah believed that no African nation on its own commanded the institutional, ideological and intellectual wherewithal to counter Western imperialism or could marshal the economic muscle necessary for long-term and sustained structural transformation. Only by pooling ideas, ideals, institutions and material resources would African states pull themselves by their bootstraps out of socioeconomic underdevelopment, political domination and marginalisation. This programmatic stance, as articulated by Nkrumah and his peers at the dawn of independence more than half a century ago, remains even more appealing today than it was in the 1960s,

for not only does Africa remain under the hegemonic control of external powers, the continent's marginal position in the structures of global power has deepened, to which I turn next.

Africa's Marginal Position in the Global Capitalist and Geopolitical Complex

As noted at the outset of this article, the fight against slavery in the western hemisphere was the pioneering agenda that spurred the emergence and spread of the pan-African movement. The movement strove to defend human equality and dignity against racialised discrimination and to liberate Black people from the shackles of subordination worldwide, through the pursuit of radical and emancipatory politics (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1996: 199). From a long and drawn-out itinerary, the final defeat of apartheid and white-minority rule in southern Africa in the 1980s and 1990s was arguably the highest point of the pan-African agenda for liberation, with the support of a truly global network that was at once transnational and transracial (Williams 2012).

The Paradox of Independence

The election of Nelson Mandela as the first Black president of an independent South Africa, coming four years after the independence of Southwest Africa (Namibia), marked both a climax and anticlimax. On the one hand it represented the final political liberation of the African continent from illegal, external occupation and illegitimate internal domination at the behest of white-minority rule. On the other hand, the final triumph against the despicable racist occupation of the continent paradoxically entrenched the marginalisation of Africa and its peoples. This is in part because the defeat of apartheid coincided with two global structural changes that combined with other forces, some internal to the continent, to confine Africa to life on the fringes: the triumph of neoliberal capitalism and the acceleration of economic globalisation.

It is ironic that the monumental successes of the pan-African movement over a long stretch of close to two centuries, from the early half of the nineteenth century to the final decade of the twentieth, were followed by the current situation, in which Africa not only remains marginal to the global power structures, with limited influence in global geopolitics, but also continues to toil under the weight of unfettered plunder, extraction and despoliation (Bond 2016, 2020). African people at home remain trapped in endemic poverty as the continent continues to occupy the lowest rungs of

global socioeconomic development indicators and holds no sway in the high politics of powerful global actors. And Africans in the diaspora continue to wrestle with the everyday vagaries of second-class citizenship and racial bias, denied the full respect and dignity due to other humans.

The persistence of racism against Black people the world over is in part indicative of the real and perceived socioeconomic standing of Africans at home and abroad. That is, Africans are disrespected, abused and insulted in part because of their material conditions. Armies of Western charity and humanitarian agencies and activists, including the media, are always keen to showcase African poverty, objectify the material conditions of Africans and drum up aid ostensibly to save Africa, the latest focus being on the situation in the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray. All this is done with unveiled paternalism and untempered Afrophilia. The depictions and representations of poverty and deprivation no doubt feed into and perpetuate racial prejudices, tropes that construct Black people as less human and contribute to keeping Africa as the target of external condescension, disrespect and domination. The earliest pan-African agenda sought to wrestle with precisely these problems, which the continent and its diasporas faced then and sadly still grapple with in today's skewed global political economy where Africa maintains a peripheral status.

The futures and fortunes of Africa in the main remain subordinated to external economic and political interests that are decidedly at odds with the desires and aspirations of African peoples at home and in the diaspora. The marginal position of Africa has intensified in contemporary times, yet this is often downplayed and dismissed by some scholars (for example, Bayart 2000; Taylor and Williams 2004). This marginalisation is in no small measure a function of an enduring alliance between multinational capital, foreign imperial interests and comprador African ruling classes, all operating in a unidirectional global complex of unrestrained extraction from and exploitation of the continent (Bond 2016).

The fact of Africa's marginal position is contrary to articles of faith that accent the benefits that would supposedly accrue to an Africa that is more integrated into the circuits of the global capitalist economy. The reality is that the continent has been pushed further to the fringes with the acceleration, intensity and extent of globalisation over the past decades. In the face of mounting marginality, Africa's contemporary crop of rulers have displayed a remarkable inability to chart a new course and have fallen way short of rising to the occasion in reimagining and reasserting the original programme of pan-Africanism – the agenda for liberation.

Africa Rising?

At the macro level of the global economy, Africa's place remains precarious. Consider, for example, that Africa's share of foreign direct investment in recent years has hovered around just over 3 per cent, and its share of global manufacturing sits at a paltry 1 per cent. Its share of global trade was a mere 2 per cent in 2018, of world GDP only 2.5 per cent, and of global trade in services just 1.9 per cent; extractives, primarily oil, accounted for close to 40 per cent of the continent's total exports (WTO 2018: 72–73). Global trade flows are heavily skewed to North America, Europe and, increasingly, Asia. Between 2015 and 2017, the value of this trade declined substantially for Africa compared to other regions of the world; export earnings declined by about 20 per cent during that period (UNCTAD 2018: 8). Africa's marginal position in the global marketplace is compounded by the internal structural imbalances of enclave colonial economies, which are characterised more by extracting rent for consumption than by value-added productivity (Bush 2018: 29).

Trade in Africa has remained restricted largely to extractive primary commodities since colonial times, with little benefit to the African citizen, a phenomenon that has become even more pervasive in the era of unfettered globalisation and thirst for raw materials of the new global economic powers, who are engaged in a 'new scramble' (Carmody 2016: 229). Worse still, much of the continent still lacks basic yet critical infrastructure to spur productivity and value-added output. Not too long ago it was estimated, for example, that the whole continent had an electricity generation output equivalent to Spain's, a country of less than 50 million people compared to Africa's population of more than a billion (Mills and Herbst 2012: 5).

In the face of these glaring problems, African has in recent years been primed and presented as the new frontier of growth and global investment. But the discourse of 'Africa Rising' is belied by the actual trends in growth and development, which hardly square up with much of the optimism in some sections of the mainstream academic and policy debates (for critiques, see Taylor 2014; Bush 2018; Khisa 2019). For example, the services sectors (primarily telecommunications, banking, insurance, leisure and hospitality), which have been the largest source of African growth, are dominated by transnational (often speculative) hot capital flows that enjoy the freedom to repatriate profits without making long-term physical investments and financial commitments, which would have a wider positive spillover for national economies. The more risky manufacturing and value-added sectors have attracted very limited and only modest investments, yet this is precisely where Africa's economies need a leap and heavy lift. Consider the fact that

Africa's manufacturing, as a share of GDP, is less than one half that of the average for all developing countries and has declined in the past years.

A services-dominated economy, which is becoming notable in some African countries whose economies are highly liberalised and privatised, is in fact a feature of postindustrial societies, which have seen the skills concentration shift away from relatively low-paying blue-collar jobs to high-paying, white-collar professions in the services industry. It is a trifle misguided to think that the least industrialised continent – Africa – can somehow parachute itself into and compete in the postindustrial global marketplace.

What is more, the services sector is largely consumptive and not productive. It has limited value addition and comparatively generates fewer jobs than manufacturing and value-added industrial production. Rather than export processing zones and industrial parks, the hyped 'rising Africa' is evident in sprawling urban real-estate and hotel complexes in Accra and Kampala, arguably built from illicit money, and coffee-shop chains in Kigali and Addis Ababa that have little capital investment (Taylor 2014; Khisa 2019). Foreign investors attracted to African countries, for one reason or the other, and who invest in real estate, coffee and fast-food chains, can easily disinvest at the slightest sociopolitical threat (real or perceived) to their business interests. The bottom line is that there has been little structural change in Africa's growth to merit an uncritical belief in a 'rising Africa'.

Today, the vast majority of African peoples are heavily afflicted by what one analyst calls the 'yokes of economic bondage' (Mathews 2018: 20). This problem has in fact worsened in the era of neoliberal triumphalism and with the blind embrace of unrestrained free market economics. The economic nationalism of the early years of independence across the continent, initiated by leaders such as Milton Obote in Uganda, Nyerere in Tanzania and Nkrumah in Ghana, who all experimented with import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) strategies, was cast aside at the behest of Western sponsored military coups and the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes (Mkandawire and Soludo 1999).

The Embrace of Neoliberalism

At another level, the attempt at pushing a Marxian pan-African global economic agenda in pursuit of economic fairness and justice, vigorously articulated by activist-intellectuals and leaders like Michael Manley and the indefatigable Walter Rodney, met fierce resistance and ultimately was abandoned giving way to the flourishing of the interests of transnational capital and the spread of the neoliberal economic agenda. The full embrace

of neoliberalism by some preeminent contemporary African rulers in the final decades of the twentieth century, such as Jerry Rawlings in Ghana and Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, stands in stark contrast to the nationalist agenda of economic emancipation of Dr Nkrumah and Dr Obote, which dovetailed with the broader, worldwide pan-African agenda of economic liberation and social emancipation championed by Rodney, Manley and others.

The opening up of African economies to transnational capital, contrary to the articles of faith by African neoliberal ideologues (for example, Moyo 2009, 2018), has not been the magic wand promised by Structural Adjustment Programmes and the attendant neoliberal capitalist economic policies of business privatisation and economic liberalisation. In fact, many African economies are yet to realise, under neoliberalism, the robust economic performance of the 1960s under the short-lived experimentation with the ISI model. There has been a somewhat blind belief in the magic of market capitalism to deliver Africa out of economic impoverishment, never mind the paucity of historical or contemporary evidence that links economic transformation and social wellbeing to unbridled global market capitalism.

In fairness, Dambisa Moyo, cited above, is not a lone crusader in the scheme of masking global capitalism's rapacious excursions around the world in the name of saving poor countries and people. There are armies of Western trained and neoliberal-imbibed economists in charge of economic policy and treasury decision-making across the African continent. Add to that the fact that the Bretton Woods institutions have been in charge of defining and determining economic policy frameworks for African countries, especially those routinely paraded as 'success stories' and paragons of economic reform. These sets of actors, the primary agents of neoliberalism, have been at the centre of implementing the 'Shock Doctrine' around the world, from Latin America to Asia and Africa (Harvey 2007; Klein 2007).

Across the continent, from Ghana to Uganda and Zambia to Tanzania, the refrain of the last three decades has been the magic of the market through the policy trio of liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation. Even with only modest growth rates to show from the neoliberal economic model of the recent past, both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have worked hard to prop up supposed success stories of economic reform and transformation. The upshot of the rush to showcase economic success, in a country like Uganda, was to depoliticise development and confine economic problems to technical fixes with all sorts of negative moral and material ramifications (Wiegratz 2016; Wiegratz, Martiniello and Greco 2018). In pursuing neoliberalism in Africa, among the leading agents of

this externally engineered economic agenda and showcasing have been the supposed torchbearers of a new pan-Africanism on the continent. This contemporary betrayal is the subject of the analysis in the next section of this article.

Contemporary Betrayal of the Pan-African Agenda for Collective Liberation

At the dawn of independence in the 1960s, as noted earlier in this article, African leaders, chiefly Ghana's Dr Nkrumah, were adamant that Africa would not survive unless it formed a united and continental front, economically and politically. For Nkrumah and some of his peers, the colonially created fragmentation and balkanisation of the continent was a recipe for permanent impoverishment and domination by foreign forces. A great part of Africa's weaknesses lay in its social and territorial fragmentation and the distorting effects of colonial borders. Nkrumah was unequivocal in stating that the independence of his country was meaningless until the entire continent had been freed of colonial occupation and safeguarded against continued imperial incursions. He was equally unflinching in making the case for an African unity that combined the continent and the diaspora. To his dismay, a great many African political actors at independence were more interested in becoming the new rulers and privileged class than buying into Nkrumah's vision for a united and strong Africa.

More than half a century later, Nkrumah could not have been more prescient, if prophetic. Without continental African unity, in concert with the worldwide African diaspora community, the continent remains vulnerable to external imperial interests, domination and marginalisation. Interestingly, today, African rulers like Uganda's Yoweri Museveni bemoan Africa's weak and fragmented fifty-five artificial nations, enclave economies and unviable markets. Yet, the same rulers are far more wedded to wielding state power and enjoying its attendant privileges in their small nations, even as they service foreign interests, than aggressively pursuing Nkrumah's vision for a united, viable and prosperous Africa.

In his crusade for African unity, Nkrumah drew influence and inspiration from the leading lights of the diaspora pan-African movement. From Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois to George Padmore and C. L. R. James, the independence-era pan-African agenda, with Nkrumah as the foremost voice on the mother continent, leaned on the thinking and activism of the African diaspora mostly in the Caribbean and the United States (Soyinka et al. 2015: 121). Having lived through the times of the end of the British Empire and witnessed the onset of American imperialism, Africans in the

diaspora perhaps understood better what was at stake for Africa in the global scheme of things. Thus, their ideas and ideals had an impact on the world view and praxis of independent Africa's arguably most important pan-African leader and thinker – Kwame Nkrumah – who had attended the historic 1945 Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England. It was no random occurrence that Padmore's remains were interred in Accra, Ghana, and that Du Bois spent his final years in Ghana as a citizen of that country, died and was laid to rest there.

In the diaspora, the radical pan-African agenda was from the outset married to the cause of liberation on the mother continent. In the Black struggles that marked the twentieth century, especially in the United States, it mattered whether or not African-American activists and leaders saw their own liberation struggles as tied to those on the mother continent, Africa. Mobilisation for and on behalf of African issues among African-American communities, in the US Congress and in the Black media, tended to gain traction especially when those issues evoked a linked fate. Sections of African American leaders understood that focusing on resolution of African problems would resonate with struggles for the betterment of Black people in the US, or that Black struggles in the US would gain traction and success, if they were bound up with African causes (Tillery 2011). This was the case with the way African Americans reacted to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the struggles for independence that took shape after the Second World War, and the fight against apartheid and racist white-minority rule in southern Africa. In all these instances, there was mass mobilisation and advocacy for and on behalf of causes in Africa that had resonance among the African diaspora – a feeling of linked fate and a shared quest for liberation that connected the diaspora with the continent. This unity of purpose was not granted its due consideration by many postindependence African leaders (Blake 2005). It was a betrayal of the original pan-African *ideal*.

At independence, many African rulers were content with being the new privileged class and taking up government positions. This meant placing nationalist aspirations above the pan-African cause as championed by Nkrumah and diaspora activist-intellectuals like Padmore and Du Bois. The new African rulers held onto their narrowly defined national sovereignty, a principle inserted in the Charter of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the 1964 Cairo Declaration on the inviolability of colonial borders. With the Cold War bifurcation in play and taking shape on the continent in earnest, Nkrumah's goal of a United States of Africa was imperilled. The key highlight very early at independence was the confrontation in Congo-Zaire that led to the assassination of that country's radically anti-imperialist

leader, Patrice Lumumba, and the subsequent installation of Mobutu Sese Seko, a notable client of American imperialistic exploits on the continent (Whitaker and Clark 2018: 60).

But the pursuit of narrow nationalist interest in due course became a poisoned chalice, as African states atrophied to the point of collapse especially in the wake of the end of the Cold War and the drying up of Western patronage. The passing of time no doubt vindicated Dr Nkrumah's strong belief that the only way Africa could counter imperialism and neocolonial exploitation was by having a united continent and a socialist agenda that reflected an African ethos and African norms and aspirations (Ackah 2016: 17).

Betrayal by the AU and the Renaissance Coalition

The OAU was formed, in the main, as a compromise between Nkrumah's more radically inclined pan-African agenda for total unification and the dissenters who preferred piecemeal and gradual bottom-up integration. Except for the diplomatic support and the mobilising platform it provided for the struggles to free several southern African countries from white-minority rule and apartheid, the OAU remained more a grouping of autocratic rulers than a progressive body that represented the interests of African peoples on the world stage. Even in its subsequent reincarnation as the African Union (AU), this supposedly pan-African organisation has fallen short of tackling the problems at the heart of the pan-African ideal. To be sure, the AU has served as an invaluable platform and as the institutional agency for advancing and defending African collective causes at the global level (Edozie and Khisa 2022), yet it has remained constrained by the actions and inactions of member states.

Consider, for example, that in the twenty-first century slavery is alive in some countries that are active members of the African Union. What else can this be other than a blatant betrayal of the pan-Africa agenda for liberation? Recall that the seminal goal of pioneer pan-African thinkers and activists was to fight and bring to an end official slavery in the diaspora. Yet today, more than two hundred years after its abolition, enslavement of Black people continues unabated and under the watch of African rulers and governments. The chilling stories of women sex-slaves shipped out of Nigeria and sold openly in 'slave markets' in Libya are an indictment of enormous proportions. The fact that certain communities in Mauritania are still treated with indignity as a slave race – even as that country's capital, Nouakchott, played host to an African Union summit in 2018 – flies in the face of all that the AU rhetorically stands for. As recently as 1981, slavery was

still legal in Mauritania. Yet its official abolition did not mean its actual end. Mauritania is considered to be the world's last stronghold of enslavement. An African country!

In 2016, the Global Slavery Index project identified Mauritania as the country with the highest population of directly enslaved people in the world. According to the project's survey, 'Afro-Mauritanians, including the Peuhl, Soninke, Wolof and Bambara, continue to be vulnerable to modern slavery as a result of their discriminatory status.' From the findings, it was estimated that more than 1 per cent of Mauritania's 4.7 million people (close to 50,000 people) lived under slavery. Neither the AU nor its predecessor, the OAU, not to mention the UN, took up this issue with the seriousness it deserves, as a shameful practice that exists in the era of the AU and is contrary to international conventions and norms.

Slavery is the worst form of human indignity and mass exploitation to have been invented in modern times, one that became almost exclusively assigned to Black people. Before the modern era of global capitalism, which rose on the pillars of, among things, the 'empire of cotton' and plantation enslavement, generally (Beckert 2015), slavery was based on grounds other than race: slaves were taken as prisoners of war and as condemned offenders, to mention but two reasons (Gomez 2019). The transition to racialised slavery was a function of the forging of a tricontinental global capitalist complex and circuits of exploitation, with Africa as the primary source of enslaved labour to the Americas and Caribbean. These destinations served as land reservoirs for the production of labour-intensive crops, mainly cotton, sugar and tobacco, demanded in Europe and North America (Mazrui 1986: 159–160).

Therefore, right from inception – in the last quarter of the eighteenth century – the struggle to denounce the badge of slavery against the Black race has been the central focus of pan-Africanism. It is most ironic, therefore, that slavery should constitute a key point of betrayal of the pan-Africanism *ideal*, that on the African continent countries still practise unofficial slavery while being full and active members of a body that embodies pan-Africanism – the African Union.

More generally, in stark contrast to the politics of African independence leaders like Nkrumah and Nyerere, the contemporary cohort of African rulers who profess faith in pan-Africanism have been big on rhetoric and small on substance. Personal interests and narrow political calculations have for the most part been their overarching focus, despite their pan-African rhetoric. For example, in the first decade of the current century we witnessed turf wars between Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, who had his own

imperialistic aspirations of being the 'king of all Africa's kings', and other autocratic rulers with their own contending hegemonic ambitions, to wit: Uganda's Museveni in the Great Lakes Region and Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi in the Horn of Africa.

This crop of contemporary African rulers, at some point referred to as the 'renaissance coalition', underlined the need to own Africa's problems, without blaming outsiders, and to craft African solutions. Accordingly, Thabo Mbeki, for example, pushed through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) while Museveni was a leading architect and advocate of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), an American programme to grant African textiles manufactures access to the US market. But neither NEPAD nor AGOA, or even the AU's Agenda 2063, addresses the marginal position of Africa in the global capitalist economy and the exploitative predisposition of multinational corporations, the masters of the global economy.

In the main, the plans and projects championed by the 'renaissance coalition' have not emancipated Africa from its deep-seated and historically produced dependency syndrome and the straitjackets of global capitalist exploitation – for a range of reasons. For one, while Thabo Mbeki pressed for 'African renaissance' through NEPAD, he did so without the requisite corresponding ideological clarity, making him little more than an advocate of multinational capital and a protector of South African business dominance on the continent (Nabudere 2001). What is more, neither NEPAD nor AGOA address the internal impediments to Africa's productivity and the external constraints that confine Africa to the status of a perpetual source of raw materials.

While acknowledging the need for an African renaissance, a cultural rebirth and political reformation, critics have rightly pointed to the ideological ambiguities in Mbeki's renaissance agenda, especially with respect to Africa's place in a global economy that is dominated and driven by the interests of multinational capital. Similarly, the African Union has operated with vague assertions about an integrated Africa that is a force in the global economy, producing hodgepodge development blueprints without the strategic foresight and ideological clarity to champion Africa's interests against competing external forces, most recently in the form of China's pronounced presence in the continent.

Within the spirit of a renaissance agenda and the rush to present a rosy picture of the continent, in the past decade or so we have had the 'Africa is rising' narrative. Not surprisingly, actors – including the Western media – who represent external interests have been at the forefront of selling the

discourse of a new Africa that is roaring, thriving and emerging in a global economy (for example, Bright and Hruby 2015). Yet, one is at a loss to determine whether the 'Africa rising' narrative is a deliberate masking strategy or derives from a genuinely optimistic intent to depart from the usual negative portrayals of the continent.

The bottom line, however, is that Africa's marginal position in the global capitalist economy has not changed in any significant way. Rather than investing in much-needed manufacturing and value-added production, Africa is stuck in primary commodities and extraction of raw materials to service external industrial production. The continent's industrialisation has more or less stalled for decades since the aborted experiment of import substitution industrialisation (IST) in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, Africa has remained subordinated to the external thirst for raw materials, and showed signs of deindustrialisation (Taylor 2014: 131). The continent remains the place to go for easy extraction of raw materials on the cheap, regardless of the new powerful actor on the global stage (Taylor 2012; Carmody 2016).

The current leading player, of course, is China, hyped as presenting a different model in its relations with African countries. The difference, quite obviously, turns on China's offering of roads and railways in exchange for capturing the continent's natural resource wealth and using its highly expensive long-term loans to potentially mortgage African states and place the future of the continent firmly in Chinese financial pockets (Carmody 2016, see especially chapter 3).

Still Leaning on Foreign Investors

At the national level, African rulers – especially the category that is often presented (or who present themselves) as visionaries for national transformation – are inordinately if naively obsessed with the pursuit of foreign investment from shadowy companies and ostensibly rich investors. The chase for the ever-elusive foreign investor takes governments down the rabbit hole and on a race to the bottom, doing away with even the most basic standards and regulations, and leaving the ordinary labourer at the mercy of business-minded employers, keen to pursue profit and pay out hefty executive salaries or bonuses while at the same time repatriating profits and employing all sorts of tactics to evade taxes. This has been the logic of capitalist exploitation and a great source of contemporary runaway wealth inequality.

As Naomi Klein so graphically documented in Asia, multinational companies take full advantage of countries where governments value the investor more than the citizen (Klein 1999). With the huge youth population on the continent, both democratic and authoritarian African governments are incessantly nervous of possible unrest. In response, they embrace rather simplistic actions and short-term manoeuvres supposedly aimed at creating jobs.

Alternatively, faced with mounting economic crises, African governments have recently turned to the African diaspora as an easy source of foreign exchange and as promoters of opportunities for development to distant outsiders uninvolved in the social and political dynamics on the ground in specific African countries. It is instructive that the African Union defines the African diaspora in development terms, as ‘people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and building of the African Union’.² The resort to the ‘diaspora option’, or the diaspora for development strategy, as a source of finance and forex, has been aggressively promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) within the strictures of neoliberalism and in the wake of the dismal performance of the Washington Consensus economic model (Whitaker and Clark 2018: 240; Pellerin and Mullings 2013).

The ‘diaspora option’, as a development strategy, conceives of migrants as sources for generating foreign exchange flows, developing new business opportunities or serving as a network through which other entrepreneurs gain access to market opportunities (Pellerin and Mullings 2013: 104). The diaspora role, here, is viewed through the prism of depoliticised development, even though some African countries have adopted dual-citizenship laws, allowing their nationals abroad to vote and maintain a legal connection with their homeland after becoming citizens in the diaspora (Whitaker 2011).

At any rate, this new approach of linking Africa and its diasporas is a major departure from the original pan-African philosophy of fraternal solidarity and camaraderie between all Africa peoples and the disparate diasporic communities (Nantambu 1998: 569). By reducing the role of the diaspora to that of agents for technocratic development needs, the African Union and individual African states inadvertently advance the same old dependency syndrome for Africa without a radical disruption of the structures of global marginality and Africa’s endemically disadvantaged position. This means that the agenda for the total liberation of Africa and its people remains elusive, a major betrayal of the historical struggles for which many Africans abroad and at home sacrificed a great deal.

Conclusion

Africa's place in the world today remains precarious and marginal even as the continent has exacted its influence and exercised its agency in a range of domain issues. It is the contention of this article that without a unified framework of engagement that includes the diaspora, Africa's economic, political and diplomatic interests on the world stage shall continue to be subordinated to the hegemonic interests and control of powerful international actors, be they the traditional Western powers or the new and emerging ones of the East – China and India.

Africa's ruling classes and sections of the intelligentsia have betrayed the continent by pursuing narrow, selfish interests instead of a long-term programme of lifting the continent from its historical doldrums (Mutunga 2018). Rather than standing up against imperial interests and steadfastly advancing an agenda for true continental liberation, African rulers have promoted or at a minimum acquiesced to, for example, America's militarisation of Africa, fighting America's 'war on terror' and contributing to creating what Samir Amin referred to as a state of 'permanent war' (Amin 2004). The global war on terror, defined and prosecuted with Western security interests at the fore, has fastened the co-optation of Africa on terms that seldom advance African needs and aspirations.

The African Union undoubtedly remains a key player and platform for aggregating and articulating African common causes and collective agendas. But neither the AU nor sub-regional economic groupings like the East African Community have done enough to forcefully and boldly assert a strong standing on the global stage or firmly articulate the interests of Africa against competing external objectives and forces. The AU, for the most part, has been a communion of rulers with severe domestic legitimacy deficits, in many instances, rather than leaders united in promoting an Africanist agenda. This failure calls for more engaged African civil societies and their diaspora kindred, organically anchored in African societal aspirations, and a coalition of transnational non-state collective efforts. For long, lip-service has been paid to forging a stronger bond of common belonging and shared interests between the continent and its worldwide diasporas. Yet the latter increasingly shoulder the financial needs of the continent more than foreign investment and aid do. Getting the continent out of the current undesirable state will require returning to the radical agenda that originally inspired pan-Africanism.

Notes

1. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 2018 General Assembly of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Dakar, and at the 2019 annual conferences of the African Studies Association in Boston and the International Studies Association in Toronto. I am grateful to the audiences at these meetings for their thoughtful feedback. I also thank two reviewers and editor of this journal for their critical and constructive comments. I greatly appreciate CODESRIA's kind invitation and generous financial support to attend the 2018 General Assembly.
2. Article 3 of the Protocol on Amendments of the Constitutive Act of the African Union. See <https://au.int/en/diaspora-civil-society-engagement>.

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