



## Editorial

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The history and legacy of Pan-Africanism, as a movement for the emancipation of Africans, is alive and strong, having overcome numerous challenges. Rooted in the foundation laid by seminal actors, such as Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah, the ideals of Pan-Africanism have remained open to embrace by successive generations. Evidence of the movement's strength and regeneration emerges periodically across global Africa, when widely publicised grave abuse, violence or oppression of black people catalyses sustained protest. Often, the power of the response is evident in the fact that a plurality of people, in diverse and distant parts of the world, are galvanised into action to forge united rebuttals against such oppressive conditions through various means (including, in the present moment, virtual platforms). Often, the result has been a tactical retreat of the oppressive forces, via miniscule reforms—a grudging acknowledgement of the wrongs against black peoples that is, however, generally followed by a return to life that is more or less the same. In other words, the status quo is maintained, and the cycle repeats over and over again.

Even with a robust attempt to sustain the Pan-African ideal, at every turn the idea of Pan-Africanism is confronted by doubt, cynicism and even resistance from within the African world. These doubts tend to be stronger the farther away from the historical foundations of Pan-Africanism we have moved, and among younger Africans for whom the dividends of historical Pan-Africanism are few and far between and rarely as tangible as they were for older Africans. The African youth perceive Pan-Africanism as a collection of dated ideas, useful only in relation to the historical struggle for independence, a struggle they now take for granted mainly because most of them have lived only the reality of 'flag' independence. For the majority, the inherited histories of colonialism and slavery seem too far removed from the realities of the oppressive character of those systems, which were, to those who experienced them, immediate, brutal and dehumanising. The present lived experiences of Africans and people of African descent, wherever they are located, seem very different and of much more press-

ing concern. Yet, the realities of neocolonialism, the persistence of overt and covert systems of oppression at economic and political levels, the undermining and even attempted erasure of systems of thought and culture of black peoples across the world, the persistence of male and white supremacist power struggles and their control over levers of global interaction, all point to the unending relevance of Pan-Africanism as the basis for organising peoples of black descent across the world.

In the last century, among the many goals that Pan-Africanism had historically advanced, two were prioritised: national independence for a colonised Africa, and continental unity. As Adom Getachew argues in this Bulletin, these goals of national independence and continental unity seemed to be in tension, given that the nation-state is a problematic framework for constituting Pan-African unity. Her analysis of the thinking of Kwame Nkrumah suggests that while he was aware of this tension, he planned to resolve it by dealing with the question of economic dependence. However, of the frameworks for building continental unity envisioned during the putative years of independence in Africa—frameworks that led to the birth of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)—the one that won the day was the least capable of transcending the narrow nationalism of postcolonial nation-state formations; it lacked the internationalism that Nkrumah had associated with complete independence.

Since the 1960s, the postcolonial framework has been inadequately Pan-African in consciousness and orientation and has occasionally been antithetical to the dreams of realising complete independence based on Pan-African ideals. The framework has also been inadequate in dealing with some of the most corrosive vestiges of colonialism. Nothing confirms this better than the hold the French state has retained on, and the rents it extracts from, its former colonies in Africa. This is clearly demonstrated by the piece in this Bulletin jointly authored by Fanny Pigeaud and Ndong Samba Sylla, which articulates the influence the French have in 'Francophone' Africa and, increasingly, the rest of the continent. Not only have the French engaged in

neutralising attempts to enact the ECO as an alternative West African currency to the CFA, but they have also done this by perniciously co-opting some African leaders into strategies that undermine the possibility of continental unity and short-circuit other recent initiatives towards a continental free trade area.

Young Africans who see Pan-Africanism as outdated might therefore be excused for the understanding and perceptions they have of the movement's historical mission. The gains of independence have been reduced over the years in ways none dreamt of during the struggle for freedom. The capture of historical Pan-Africanism and its re-framing into a state project has done more damage to building a Pan-African consciousness than had been anticipated. Regretting the failure to realise Nkrumah's idea of 'unity government' at the Accra Summit in 1965, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere confessed that, 'We of the first-generation leaders of independent Africa have not pursued the objective of African unity with vigour, commitment and [the] sincerity that it deserved.' He further elaborated that what they failed to realise at the time was that:

Once you multiply national anthems, national flags and national passports, seats of the United Nations, and individuals entitled to a 21-gun salute, not to speak of a host of ministers, prime ministers and envoys, you would have a whole army of powerful people with vested interests in keeping Africa balkanised.<sup>1</sup>

The cost to Africa of the failure to unite has been immense indeed and many of the challenges the continent confronts today can be traced partly to this failure.

As Horace Campbell shows in the introduction, the articles in this issue of the Bulletin, while drawing from the historical context of Pan-Africanism, seek to engage with more contemporary issues, of interest largely to the younger generation. This is especially so regarding the possibilities offered by digital technologies to forge Pan-African solidarities, spread Pan-African values and find new ways of re-imagining a Pan-African world. The vast potential opened by the explosion of information across media and digital platforms, the extensive mobility enabled by expanding infrastructure, and the ease with which ideas, people and goods move, all suggest that a contemporary

Pan-African vision can be activated to energise and correct the failures of the past. If we think about the digital age as an enabler of new forms of struggle, then this opens doors wide for building a new Pan-African consciousness. This would be a consciousness that still held the promise of the unity of African peoples, as a basis for building resistance against extant forms of violence, oppression and abuse. It would be a form of consciousness that would be critical of class-based forms of exploitation and sought to diminish racism, sexism and marginalisation. In short, it would be an emancipatory consciousness.

Indeed, the success of African arts, poetry, music, literatures and fashion in crossing borders and transcending boundaries points to a new consciousness that is continental and diasporic in reach, and emancipatory in orientation. Part of its emancipatory thrust rests on its refusal to be hemmed into narrow nation-state frameworks. Indeed, not only has this reality led to new criticisms of the biography of the nation-state, but it has also revealed the very oppressive and violent history upon which this biography of the nation-state is based. A fresh thrust of Pan-African consciousness is beckoning, and intellectuals in Africa, perhaps even more than those located elsewhere, need to seize the opportunity and respond to Julius Nyerere's challenge at Ghana's 40<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary celebrations: 'My generation led Africa to political freedom. The current generation of leaders and peoples of Africa must pick up the flickering torch of African freedom, refuel it with their enthusiasm and determination, and carry it forward.'

## Note

1. Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, speech at Ghana's 40<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary celebrations on 6 March 1997, published in *New African*, 3 May 2013. Accessible online at <https://newafricanmagazine.com/3723/>

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