

Pan-Africanism. A Legacy of Slavery

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Summary

Pan-Africanism has been studied as an ideology, an epistemology, a theory; and also, as a social movement. However, it has insufficiently been studied as an institutionalized phenomenon and as a producer of knowledge. Most work has been conducted on the emergence of Pan-Africanism in the African diaspora – in the form of Black nationalism and internationalism - in the mid-to-late 19th century. Scholarship has also focused on how Pan-Africanism spread through a series of meetings, conferences and congresses over the course of the first half of the 20th century, beyond the United States and the Caribbean to build on the ideas, activities and thoughts of (mainly) men of African descent throughout the African diaspora. The ways in which the roles of Africans – rather than African diasporic black people – increasingly became more prominent in the spread of Pan-Africanism has also been documented and described.

Yet, far less has been written about Pan-Africanism as an epistemology, that is as a set of ideas and ideologies that emerged directly from the concrete experiences of (mainly) men of African descent. First in the African diaspora and then in the African continent. And far less has been said about how the ideas, ideologies and social movement of Pan-Africanism in the African diaspora were transported to the African continent and transformed into institutional structures, which were without precedent in the Diaspora. Description and evaluation of these last two issues are the primary goal of this dissertation.

More specifically, in this dissertation, it is argued that Pan Africanism is part of an Africana intellectual tradition. Both Pan-Africanism, as a series of epistemologies – and the Africana intellectual tradition - emerged directly from history and experience. It is therefore argued that epistemic Pan-African knowledge production (as well as other forms of knowledge production belonging to the Africana intellectual tradition) uses history and experience as its reference. That is, it does not construct its intellectualisms from reading the enlightenment writers, such as is commonly practiced within the European intellectual tradition. In continuation of this argument, I argue that it is history and experience which create the basis for both the analysis of Pan-Africanism and the continued existence of a mutual connection between African people and people of African descent, a basis which is carried first and foremost by the (human) condition taking precedent over other variables such as cultural ties. The centrality of the concept of (human) condition within this dissertation is undergirded by a focus on power relations and the adoption of sovereignty. Here, sovereignty is analyzed in three ways, namely: territoriality; citizenship; and ‘international law’.

This dissertation also directly analyzes Pan-Africanism as a legacy of slavery. The foundations of Pan-Africanism stem from the antislavery movement in the United States and Caribbean. Despite this foundation, this dissertation uses the 1900 Pan-African Conference as the formal start of Pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism thus began as a social movement, increasingly an international social movement, from a position of: entrenched racial disadvantage within the context of the United States and the Caribbean; from the circumstances of racial inequality of Black populations across the diaspora, including especially in England and France; and, of colonialism in continental Africa. These circumstances included endemic racial inequality and widespread racial discrimination. They also included key initiatives that can be described as resistance and efforts at self-determination and community development,

nationally and internationally. In petitions at the 1900 Pan-African Conference and five subsequent Pan-African Congresses between 1919 and 1945, Pan-African thinkers made little or no reference to the writings of European descent intellectuals, but primarily to the experiences of Africans in the diaspora and Africa.

As it developed throughout the Diaspora, Pan-Africanism contributed directly to decolonization and to national independence in African nations, as can be seen in the works of some of the prominent thinkers in the Diaspora – including Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, Edward W. Blyden, Eric Williams, C.L.R James, George Padmore and W.E.B. Du Bois, as well as in the work, and political practices of African thinkers in the continent, including Kwame Nkrumah and Ahmed Sékou Touré. I have two sub-themes in this dissertation. First, while it is mainly men at the forefront of the movement, clearly women also were systematically involved, and clearly gender roles and expectations had a significant influence on how Pan-Africanism unfolded. I attempt to highlight some of these developments. Second, while English-speaking nations – the USA, England, and the English-speaking Caribbean – are the core of Pan-Africanism, it is also clear that thinkers and activists from French-speaking, Spanish-speaking, Portuguese-speaking and Dutch-speaking nations were involved. It stands to reason then, given the scope of European colonialism in Africa and the Americas, that Pan-Africanism also reached and influenced its more peripheral regions. I also attempt to highlight some of these developments.

Throughout its history, Pan-Africanism saw numerous unreasonable responses from predominantly (former) colonizing powers to reasonable arguments voiced in Pan-African congress petitions and speeches. This happened against the background of a changing world order in which Pan-Africanism contributed to the struggle against slavery, colonialism, imperialism and racism. These changes in the world order contributed to changes in the balance of power and thus sovereignty. Whereas Pan-Africanism started in a situation dominated by the necessity to engage at the end of the 19th century, in the course of the 20th century, it moved to a situation in which it increasingly was able to confront (former) colonial and imperial powers.

As the circumstances of world politics and national development changed, so did the epicenter of Pan Africanism, and in this dissertation, I highlight how Pan-Africanism moved its epicenter from the Diaspora to Africa, where it was transformed and institutionalized. It was institutionalized in the form of the African Development Bank, the Organization of African Unity and its successor, the African Union with its legislative body, the Pan-African Parliament.