Pan-Africanism: A Dream Delayed. Is It Africa's Only Realistic Option

Ian Edelstein
Australian National University

Pan-Africanism implies many things to many people and is often, if not usually, misunderstood. In one sense it is simply about geography. The geography of a continent split up into 54 countries. Many of the countries were artificially "created" by their colonial rulers and because of that borders were drawn to suit the colonisers not the indigenous people. What is the correct path to rectify this false geography? Is Pan Africanism the solution, or part of the solution, to this postcolonial dilemma?

Pan-Africanism emerged in the diaspora as a reaction to, and consequence of, the transatlantic slave trade. "As Robert Chrisman correctly argued, 'it was precisely the (capture) and uprooting of millions of Africans and conditions of slavery which laid the foundations for Pan-Africanism and Black nationalism in the United States and West Indies' (1973:3). However, its birth can be traced to the founding of the African Association in London in 1897 and the convening, in the same city, of the Pan-African Conference three years later by Trinidadian lawyer, H. Sylvester Williams (Geiss, 1974:177)."[1]

At the 2nd, 3rd and 4th congresses the struggle against racism, rights in the black diaspora as well as championing freedom for the African colonies were discussed. The 1945 Congress which was held in Manchester was ground-breaking because of the large African contingent. The future leaders of Africa began to adopt the language of Pan-Africanism to express or interpret the conditions and aspirations of their people, in their respective countries. And as each of those leaders went back to their respective colonial homes they began to filter and domesticate those ideas into the struggles of their peoples. For Senghor it was Negritude, for Kenyatta it was Harambee, for Nkrumah it was Consciencism, for Nyerere Ujamaa, for Kaunda it was Humanism. These ideas were a mixture of cultural and political types. There was no one view of what Pan-Africanism was or should be. However there was a consensus about the need to end colonialism, racial oppression and to make "life more abundant" for the Africans. Those ideas became part of state ideology after independence.

Abubakar Momoh contends "that Pan-Africanism started as an intellectual movement. ' He goes on to state that 'the condition of colonialism in Africa and racial oppression in the Diaspora were automatically given the same connotation and contextualisation by the pan-Africanists. It was therefore impossible to oppose oppression and prejudices without being pan Africanist.'[2] Paul Adogamhe writes that "African States, at independence, shared important commonalities that were to serve as the stimulus for unity. The newly independent states shared the common experience of having been subjected to slavery, colonialism and imperialism. On securing political independence as sovereign states, they were thrust into international economic and political systems, in which the rules and

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[1] Paul G Adogamhe, "Pan-Africanism Revisited:Vision and Reality of African Unity and Developement," 2, no. 2 (2008).

[2] Abubakar Momoh, "Does Pan-Africanism Have a Future in Africa? In search of the Ideational Basis of Afro-Pessimism " *African Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (2003).

regulations were not designed by and for them, and were called to participate on terms disadvantageous to their progressive development. Their collective historical experiences and memories of marginalisation and socio-cultural and racial affinities developed a collective solidarity – a sense of oneness and the consciousness of belonging to Africa. This became a powerful mobilising and unifying force for African peoples and societies rooted in Pan-Africanism."[3]

"Soon after, the Pan-African continental movement fractured into two major ideological blocs, namely, the Casablanca progressives led by Ghana and the Monrovia conservatives led by Nigeria. The Monrovia group consisted of Nigeria, Liberia and most of the French-speaking African countries. The Casablanca group consisted of Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Algeria, Congo, Mali, Tanzania, and Egypt. The Casablanca group favoured political integration as a prerequisite to economic integration and a socialist path to economic development. In addition to Nkrumah, the political standard-bearers of this radical and militant brand of Pan-Africanism and African socialism were Ben Bella of Algeria, Patrice Lumumba of Congo, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea, Modibo Keita of Mali, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt."[4]

"The twenty-four members of the Monrovia bloc considered their political independence to be still very fragile and therefore advocated a gradual approach to the question of African Unity over those of the Casablanca bloc that advocated integration based on the institutional framework of a 'federalist model.' Subsequently, the idea of a continental unity based on the federal model was shelved and despite the serious split between the two groups over the speed and scope of African integration, the two blocs came together in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to form the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963."[5]
However, "The tension between the two groups persisted within the OAU but it was, however, subordinated to other more pressing issues of liberating the continent from the remaining vestiges of colonialism and apartheid."[6] Unfortunately, this ideological and philosophical schism has endured through the decades. The fact is that not only was an unsatisfactory compromise agreed upon, it was apparent that the organisation from which the compromise arose the OAU, was ultimately ineffective. The African Union (which has just celebrated its 10th anniversary) was later established by African leaders cognisant of the shortcomings of the OAU. During the lead up to formation of the African Union (AU), the same ideological conflicts which had characterised the lead up to the formation of the OAU almost 40 years before arose. Ironically, the AU is loosely based on the European Union, Africa's ex-colonisers, not the federal model of the USA.   Many is an African nationalist who has looked at the United States with its wealth and power – and then dreamt of a 'United States of Africa'."[7]

The political unity among African states was mainly realized on the paper of the OAU charter. In the aftermath of the Cold War, African states have disintegrated into civil wars,

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[3] Adogamhe, "Pan-Africanism Revisited:Vision and Reality of African Unity and Developement."
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ali A. Mazrui, *Towards A Pax Africana: A study of Ideology and Ambition*, ed. Julian Pitt-Rivers and Ernest Gellner, The Nature of Human Society Series (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967).

ethnic cleansing and border skirmishes. Meanwhile, African leaders have dissipated their economic wealth by waging wars of attrition and mortgaging their natural resources to unscrupulous Western industrial nations for arms to fight themselves and destroy their ecology. However, they are beginning to acknowledge that the bad governance of yesteryears and past failures to manage and resolve these conflicts have been counter-productive to goals of African Common Security and development'." [8]

We could spend a lot of time discussing the great Pan-Africanists of the past, We could analyse Pan-Africanism, separating it as an intellectual concept from Pan-Africanism as a social movement and ultimately a political ideology. I would like instead, however, to focus on what makes this "idea" or concept or ideology so threatening. A form of unification is after all, not such a unique or outlandish idea. What makes the USA such a powerful force both economically and politically? Could the fact that the USA consists of 50 states unified under a federal system have something to do with it? The nations of Europe who fought against each other in wars over many centuries decided to unite under the banner of the European Union. Today in South America there are initiatives to work together for the benefit of the continent. Pan-Africanism however seems to be a "dirty word", a concept derided by many Africanist scholars and other intellectuals. Why is this? Could racism be a part of any explanation? What is at the root of this Afro-Pessimism?

It is in historical terms very recently that Africa freed itself from the shackles of colonial rule. However, strong links to ex-colonial powers remain, and such a powerful legacy has left its scars. Pan-Africanism, while not a panacea, was and remains a positive influence in overcoming said legacy.

Pan-Africanism is and always has been a threat to the economic interests of the colonisers who today continue to exploit Africa through neo-colonial policies. Economic links to previous rulers seem to be particularly strong in Francophone Africa where financial dealings still run through the French Treasury.

A quote from a speech by Albert Sarraut, the French Colonial Secretary of State in 1923 puts colonial policy plainly. I quote: 'What is the use of painting the truth? At the start colonisation was not an act of civilisation, nor was it a desire to civilise. It was an act of force motivated by interests. An episode in the vital competition which, from man to man, from group to group, has gone on ever increasing; the people who set out to seize colonies in distant lands were thinking primarily of themselves, and working for their own profits, and conquering for their own power.' Sarraut concluded his speech with these words: 'The origin of colonisation is nothing else than enterprise of individual interests, a one-sided and egotistical imposition of the strong upon the weak." [9]

In the same vein Jean-Paul Sartre observed in 1968 that colonisation is not merely a matter of conquest. "It is by its very nature an act of cultural genocide. Colonisation cannot take place without systematically liquidating all the characteristics of the native society - and simultaneously refusing to integrate the natives with the mother country and denying their

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[8] Adogamhe, "Pan-Africanism Revisited:Vision and Reality of African Unity and Developement."
[9] Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, Panaf Edition ed. (Panaf Books Limited, 1970).

access to its advantages. Colonisation is, after all, an economic system; the colony sells its raw materials and agricultural products at a reduced price to the colonising power. The latter, in return, sells its manufactured goods to the colony at world market prices. This curious system of trade is only possible if there is a colonial sub-proletariat which can be forced to work for starvation wages. For the subject people this inevitably means the extinction of their character, culture, customs, sometimes even language. They live in their underworld of misery like dark phantoms ceaselessly reminded of their sub-humanity." [10]

Recently, G. Pascal Zachary a professor at Arizona State University who had previously worked for the Wall Street Journal for 13 years wrote an article in The Atlantic Monthly which was headed, *As Qaddafi Died, So Did His Craziest Dream and Mistake: Pan Africanism*. Zachary writes "Qaddafi's death-- and the outpouring of support for the late Libyan leader in sub-Saharan Africa following his demise-- is a reminder that Pan-Africanism was an historic mistake of enormous proportions-- a simple-minded political ideology that for the past 50 years or so has done more harm than good for Africa's standing in the world."[11] Later in the article Zachary states that "the contradiction between the realities of African diversity and the ideology of Pan Africanism were never more nakedly obvious then when Qaddafi claimed the mantle of African-ness.[12] The article ends with this paragraph "With Qaddafi now dead, perhaps Pan Africanism as politics and morality cannot survive much longer, even as a strange notion. Better to recognise the essential diversity of Africa than to sacrifice that diversity for a false unity".[13]

It seems apparent that the concept of Pan-Africanism seems to elicit strong emotional reactions from all sorts of people. Zachary, is not someone without experience of Africa. He seems however, to view Pan Africanism as a threat to "diversity", and whatever that might imply to him.

Are Africans more diverse than Europeans or Americans who have successfully negotiated unions to the mutual benefit of citizens of sovereign states in the former case, or in the latter federally (the USA)?

Is Pan-Africanism, in whatever form, an essential tool for African progress today? The challenge to be faced is of changing governance systems, making progress in eradicating poverty and at the same time competing with other regions and continents effectively on the global stage.

With these goals in mind, it would be timely that the arguments for Pan-Africanism be clearly articulated. If the people of Africa begin this debate with all the facts provided transparently and honestly, progress might result. If a people-driven movement for Pan-Africanism was to take root in multiple countries, progress would quickly ensure. Leaders in democracies would take the People's cue and work towards the intended goal. The advantages of unification, federal or otherwise, should be "taken to the people" to be

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[10] Jean-Paul Sartre, *On Genocide* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

[11] G. Pascal Zachary, "As Qaddafi Died, So Did His Craziest Dream and Mistake: Pan-Africanism," *The Atlantic Monthly* 2012.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

understood and ultimately endorsed. If support is not garnered, any form of unification will be viewed with suspicion by the people and be difficult to successfully negotiate.

Tim Murithi writes that "the first 10 years of the AU revealed that the Pan-Africanist project remains predominantly a top-down affair with elites from across Africa crafting and moulding the institutions to govern the continent, often without sufficiently consulting their publics."[14] This echoes my observation that Pan-African projects without the People's enthusiastic support tend to remain an elitist pipe-dream. Murithi further states that "At its inception the AU waxed lyrically about its commitment to reaching out and engaging civil society. Its founding document, the constitutive act, is unambiguous in its commitment 'to build a partnership between governments and all segments of civil society' and to promote the 'participation of the African peoples in the activities of the Union'. However, ten years on, it is clear that the AU has mainly paid lip service to empowering African citizens to engage and influence their states. This is particularly evident in the difficulties faced by African civil society organisations that seek to engage the AU in Addis Ababa, as well as its liaison offices around the continent.

The regional economic communities (RECs) are another issue where genuine Pan-Africanism is challenged. The RECs have often positioned themselves as countervailing focal points for collective action and the AU has yet to ensure effective coordination, particularly on issues pertaining to peace, security, governance, the rule of law, citizen participation, and development. The AU and the RECs need to increase their level of interaction and communication in order to ensure effective coordination and collective action."[15]

Chris Landsberg writes that "It is only in the post-Cold War, post-apartheid era that African states and leaders could focus their attention on the question of building a community or society of African states on the conviction that the continent's 54 states could negotiate common institutions, norms, principles and policies that all African states would voluntarily agree to subject themselves to and live by. This process of building a society of states, or a community of African states, could be referred to as 'African Continentalism', and could be contrasted here with classical Pan-Africanism, which originally aims at constructing a supra-national order, or common command, in Africa. African Continentalism takes the independence of African states as a reality and seeks ways to get them to co-operate more effectively and build common approaches to addressing problems, while classical Pan-Africanism hoped to transcend the independence of African states through amalgamation."[16] Landsberg explains that "'when Thabo Mbeki became president of South Africa his government pursued'[17] what he (Landsberg) calls 'a unique variant of Pan-Africanism which he designates here as African Continentalism.'[18] He continues by explaining that 'it is applied here to imply agreements or policies that favour regionalisation

[14] Tim Murithi, "The African Union at Ten: An Appraisal," *African Affairs* (2012).
[15] Ibid.
[16] Chris Landsberg, "Afro-Continentalism: Pan-Africanism in Post-Settlement South Africa's Foreign Policy," *Journal of Asian and African studies* (2012).
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

or regional co-operation between states, or deep and regulated forms of regional cooperation between nations within the continent.'"[19]

Thabo Mbeki, I would contend, saw himself as an Africanist but he and many within the ANC recoiled at making the leap to what Landsberg calls classical Pan-Africanism. African Continentalism is in some ways the polar opposite of Pan-Africanism because it implicitly recognises and confirms the "colonial drawn" states. It is debatable whether the strengthening of the RECs would be in the interest of all, particularly the smaller states. A question remains as to whether such a policy would create regions in competition with each other. The RECs would be led by regional hegemons, with smaller, less powerful states within their regions or orbits. The jury is still out as to whether the smaller states would benefit proportionately, or whether this arrangement would result in increased exploitation by their powerful neighbours.

In order to open debate on this contentious issue, I would like to stress at the outset that not only is this issue of interest to Africanists of all ideological stripes, it is germane that we focus on the issue as one of practical importance. For far too long political leaders, some sincere and committed, and others opportunistic and cynical, have donned the Pan-African mantle. Promises have been made, expectations raised and inevitably disappointment followed. It is long overdue that serious debate at all levels of society commence on this important concept. Discussion of Pan-Africanism has been the exclusive preserve of Africa's "philosopher kings", politicians, academics and scholars. No wonder ordinary people are confused! Many wonder if the concept is attainable, or even practical? In order to understand this sometimes emotive topic and come to a decision, one needs to examine the potential benefits as well as possible shortcomings.

In his 1963 book *Africa Must Unite* Kwame Nkrumah makes the case for continental government for Africa. "He confronts the issue of the perception that Africa is poor, although it is acknowledged that the continent is known to contain vast mineral resources."[20]

What is remarkable is that Nkrumah's book which was written in the early 1960s and reflects upon events before and after Ghana's independence and upon his Pan-Africanist philosophy, seems so fresh and topical today. Sadly, not much or enough has changed. The issues and challenges are largely the same. What is different is that because of the political changes which have taken place in the last 50 years Nkrumah's work seems to us to be relatively tame. It seems almost quaint that he was viewed as such a radical. But a half-century of "cold" and "hot" wars, 21st-century polarisations of ideologies as well as being able to retrospectively assess postcolonial history puts his contribution in perspective.

Because of Africa's history, its brand of colonialism, together with the imposed Nation states of the 1885 Berlin conference, arguably too many non-viable states were created. Many interstate conflicts have directly or indirectly caused or been exacerbated by what some might consider these artificial borders. Are there therefore too many countries? Many of

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*.

the states are weak entities and might be better served as provinces of their more powerful neighbours.

The concept of the Nation State has less resonance in Africa than in other continents. It was a relatively recently imposed structure in much of Africa and has arguably had a negative effect on many aspects of life. In the quest for sustainable growth in agriculture and concerns over food shortages and malnutrition over vast parts of Africa, questions as to why Africa is in the state it is needs to be addressed. The Nation state has probably not been the best equipped vehicle to deal with Africa's needs in applied ecology. There is a pressing need for African states to co-ordinate their efforts to revolutionise food production in order to overcome food shortages and the resultant problems. New approaches to agriculture and sustainable development based on respect for natural ecosystems might not always respect the boundaries of the Nation state. A Pan-African or transcontinental vision is required. The corporatized values of some governments and the economic pressure they are subjected to by global financial institutions, multinationals and foreign governments does not augur well for progressive agroecological planning in continental Africa.

The advantages of a unified Africa would include, although controversial, a stronger military which could if required be used to see off invasions and institute RTP (Responsibility to Protect) missions within Africa thus make foreign interventions obsolete.

A large economic bloc would place Africa in more competitive position. Having "clout" in trade negotiations and frankly more control of certain commodity sectors, would allow Africans, for the first time, to manipulate and stabilise prices due to not competing with neighbours. This would create value in the long term. With the increased wealth, focus could be placed on long-term planning to eradicate poverty and raise the living standards of the majority of the populace which would include education, health care and housing.

Cconclusion:
The rivalry between the Casablanca and Monrovia blocs of more than half a century ago has not dissipated. If anything, the ideological competition seems to have revived. Whether it is about the formation and evolution of the AU or another issue, the debate continues to rage. It is unfortunate that Pan-Africanism which should be a vehicle for unification continues to be a bone of contention throughout the continent. As the old conflict continues, the younger generations remain ill-informed and confused about what Pan-Africanism stands for today.

 "Those who are discontented with the African Union acknowledge the formal existence of unity, but fault the genuineness of its Pan-African commitment and its achievements. This is evident at several levels. While the political and business elite, as well as civil society actors, who work across borders, are often supportive of Pan-African interaction and solidarity, the vast majority of citizens across the continent do not know the AU exists. For this silent majority, Pan-Africanism is not yet a lived experience."[21]

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[21] Murithi, "The African Union at Ten: An Appraisal."

Pan-Africanism is by definition a coming together, a uniting of countries. All other forms are ignoring "the elephant in the room" which is the difficult task of confronting the changing of borders, (or re-drawing the map). It has long been acknowledged that African countries borders are often unnatural and recently imposed. Why then is this topic taboo? Is it not high time that Africans should, in a peaceful and inclusive way, attempt "border change"? After all, "regime change" often takes place whether democratically or through interventions, and continues to be attempted, sometimes at great cost. Many observers see Africa as a terminal case. Could she not revive and grow through mutual help, self-reliance and unification – i.e. Pan-Africanism?

Let us not be naïve about this. People's views and attitudes towards outsiders are usually determined by self-interest with varying doses of altruism or xenophobia thrown into the mix. They are also influenced by culture, history, and religion. In Africa there are long-standing traditions or cultural norms which some would say might make integration between communities (or even states) a natural progression. Some of these, from various regions, include Harambee – the Kenyan tradition of community self-help events, literally meaning "all pull together" in Swahili; Ujamaa which comes from the Swahili word for extended family, a characteristic being that a person becomes a person through the people or community; Ubuntu (or botho) which refers to or encompasses essential human virtues, compassion and humanity in interpersonal relationships.

Even people of goodwill are fearful of radical change. It is up to the leaders to put personal ambitions and vanity aside, and seriously contemplate a truly bold and new agenda for the continent. "The injunction that the great Pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah bequeathed to subsequent generations is still valid: 'Africa must unite, or disintegrate individually.'[22]

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[22] Ibid.