Ideas Matter:
Framing Pan-Africanism, its Concept and History

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Abstract

This article looks at the rich history of Pan-Africanism considering its many twists and turns and ambiguities in order to provide an original frame for tackling the writing of its unfolding – both in the sense of the Pan-African concept`s development and its realisation in history. Therefore, it contains an extensive treatment and a critical discussion of Pan-Africanism`s historiography from Geiss (1968) to Adi (2018).The article hints at some crucial aspects so far missing or being underrepresented in prevailing accounts, regarding convincing readings of the entanglements between global, colonial and metropolitan levels in the historiography of Pan-Africanism. It is argued, in particular, that more attention should be paid to existing global histories of nationalism and of global racial discourses, and to the interplay between *modern (European)* political categories and *modern (African)* Pan-African ways of reasoning. Moreover, the ambiguities and diversity of colonial situations should be taken into account in a more sophisticated manner than is the case. The article sketches how

such a slightly different account of Pan-Africanism`s history in the 20th century could look like.

To define Pan-Africanism is no easy task. Though the word "Pan-Africanism" first appeared in print in 1900 – around the conference meeting organised by Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams (1869-1911) in London in July of that year – the ideas and concepts ingrained in it are older. Nevertheless, it was since then that the first steps in the development of what was to become an increasingly organised "movement" were taken and left clearly recognisable traces in the historical record (see Geiss 1968: 139-156, Sonderegger 2010: 175-187, Adi 2018: 19-23, 25-28). In 1919, the African American scholar and public intellectual William Edward Burghard DuBois (1868-1963) used the opportunity of the peace treaties in Paris at the end of World War One to stage what he named the First Pan-African Congress. Five decades later, in 1968 a first extensive treatment on decolonisation and the role African ideas and activities played in this process of world historical significance was published in Germany; this book was simply called *Panafrikanismus* (Geiss 1968). The very next year, its author, the German historian Imanuel Geiss published an article under the same heading, albeit this time in English. This was half a century ago, and it opened in the following way,

> "Although it is talked about a great deal, Pan-Africanism is one of the least known political movements or concepts of our time. There are a number of reasons for this: as a concept Pan-Africanism is still *very vague*, today perhaps more than only a few years ago, and its history is *complicated* and little explored; …" (Geiss 1969: 187, my emphasis)

Research and exploration of the topic has increased over the following decades. Today, much more is known about particular protagonists, networks and organisations falling, in one way or another, into the range of what is, often without any further reflection, absorbed into the realm of "Pan-Africanism". Conceptually, our understandings of Pan-Africanism are still "very vague", and matters are "complicated", as Geiss (1969) put it; and it is not by chance that Geiss` book – and its English translation published a

few years later in particular (Geiss 1974) – is still considered a classic description of Pan-Africanism`s history.

One of the reasons for the difficulties in trying to define Pan-Africanism is due to its already long and multifaceted history. It is not a history that can be told in one singular linear narrative. Many people today understand it, to various degrees, in terms of a "young", progressive, oppositional, anti-systemic liberation movement dedicated to fundamental, radical critique of ruling inequalities in today`s world. Others think instantly of the institutional level and the so-called Pan-African institutions that came to life in the wake of decolonization, chief among them the *Organisation of African Unity* (1963) and its successor organisation, the *African Union* (2001/02). Here, having grown into a heavy and barely flexible bureaucracy (a system of its own), the opposition or anti-systemic dimension of these institutions` "Pan-Africanism" is – if it is kept alive at all – directed exclusively against the dominant powers in world politics and the international economy. This is in striking contrast to the many forms of Pan-African intellectual activities that are well alive on civil societal levels among Africans and people of African descent.

Pan-Africanism therefore is many different things at once, and it has been that way for some time already. Pan-Africanism is older than it seems to many. Some "essential" features of Pan-African thought can be located in the minds and writings of Africans living in West and South Africa as early as the 19th century, and even earlier in other parts of the globe to which men and women of African origin were dispersed during the centuries of the Atlantic slave trade. Still, most people think of the mid-20th century when Pan-Africanism is concerned, while some would extend the time frame to the first half of that century, but tend to keep its history to a relatively short period nonetheless.

This trend was already evident when Imanuel Geiss (1969: 187) considered the new political varieties in Pan-African thought emerging to the full after World War Two which were aiming at least at participating, if not at assuming power right away, in terms of "Pan-Africanism in its strictest sense". This definition – quite arbitrary in fact and hindsight – is understandable to a certain degree as Geiss, in the 1960s, was writing under the spell of the high hopes of decolonisation and early independence. However, this is only one fragment of Pan-Africanism`s history. Actually,

Geiss` time perspective in looking at the history of Pan-Africanism was much broader than might be expected:

> "Although Pan-Africanism burst upon the world scene rather abruptly and spectacularly after the second world war, its roots go farther back in history than is commonly thought. If the actual beginning of Pan-Africanism in its strictest sense is taken as 1958, with the first two conferences ever held on African soil (although they continued the tradition of their forerunners), it has both a narrower and a wider pre-history; the former dating back to the first Pan-African Conference, held in London in July 1900, while the origins of the latter can be traced back to the end of the eighteenth century." (Geiss 1969: 187)

Henceforth, the year 1787 in particular was going to become sort of a short-hand date for the beginning of this long time history of Pan-Africanism (see Frühwirth in this volume). Geiss summarized the reasoning behind this dating well,

> "In 1787, at the corners of the famous triangle of the slave-trade (later the triangle of Pan-Africanism), important developments occurred which were to become relevant for the formation of Pan-Africanism: in America the effective beginning of organized abolitionism and of organized activities by free Afro-Americans; in Britain the beginning of abolitionist agitation; and in West Africa, as an indirect result of abolitionism, the foundation of Sierra Leone, which was to make a significant contribution to the formation of the modern intellectual elites in British West Africa." (Geiss 1969: 187f.)

What Geiss hinted at – in the Eurocentric terminology of "pre-history" so common at the times (and, unfortunately, still with us) – might be better called a long-term history of Pan-African intellectual activism, long pre-dating the coming of age of the Pan-African Congress movement in 1919 as well as the Black nationalist variants of Pan-Africanism in North America and the Caribbean since World War One. Indeed, Geiss` book contains essential materials on it (Geiss 1968, Geiss 1974), as does the recently published monograph on the history of Pan-Africanism by Hakim Adi (2018).

The rich history of Pan-Africanism is full of twists and turns, of adherence to dogmatic beliefs, and of dissidence. That is another reason for the conceptual "vagueness" of Pan-Africanism. Its history is not only a history of struggling against a seemingly clear-cut foe – i.e., White oppression – but one of struggles for differing social and political goals between those who were engaged in it. Those in opposition to White oppression – whether in the African diasporic "slave" or later "post-emancipatory societies" or in African "colonies" – were all sorts of people; different in kind and in temperament, different in origin, language and culture, different in outlook and vision. The history of Pan-Africanism is therefore a history of disagreement and factual infighting at least as much as one of proclaimed unity and lived solidarity.

Pitfalls and Inconsistencies in Pan-African Claims of "Unity"

Few writers have tried to write book-length histories of Pan-Africanism. The first historian of Pan-Africanism who dared to do so was George Padmore (1902-1959) when he edited *"Colonial and…Coloured Unity: A Programme of Action: History of the Pan-African Congress"* in 1947 – including a whole section written by W.E.B. DuBois on "The Pan-African Movement" (DuBois 1963 [1947]: 13-26). DuBois was a historian by profession, Padmore, however, was a journalist and political activist. Not surprisingly, the book is not dry nor academic altogether, at least not in tone, but critically engaged against colonialism and racism. One of the contributors to this volume, South African writer Peter Abrahams (1919-2017), writes in it,

> "the Colonial struggle has entered a new phase, a militant phase. … But while militant, this phase is not chauvinistic, narrow or racial. It is positive and constructive." (in Padmore 1963 [1947]: 12)

That said, it becomes clear that the anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles of the past, and Pan-Africanism as a specific version of these, were considered as "chauvinistic, narrow" and sometimes "racial" in Western public opinion. This is against what Abrahams objected in the first place.

But, what is more, Abrahams and some other Pan-African intellectual activists viewed certain branches of the Pan-African tradition in the same vein. Peter Abrahams` great novel *A Wreath for Udomo*, published in 1956, about the "Pan-African *cum* African anti-colonial national" revolutionary

movement set in a fictitious country called "Panafrica", provides outspoken evidence of this sentiment (Abrahams 1979 [1956]). That former "friends" of his reacted bitterly to this publication calling him a "traitor", fits the picture (see Lindfors 1986: 77f.). Some versions of Pan-Africanism seemed to some Pan-Africanists themselves "narrow"-minded, "chauvinistic"-jingoistic, "racial"-racist even (Abrahams, in Padmore 1963: 12), and they might, if followed up, lead to dangerous political developments with potentially disastrous consequences. Therefore, one had to speak out against them as uncompromisingly as possible.

Launched to the same effect was Padmore`s (1972b [1956]: 65-82) denunciation of Garveyism in terms of a "Black Zionism", criticizing it for its ultra-nationalism, its advocacy of racial segregation and its basically pro-capitalist orientation. His judgement came in round terms. Though Padmore credited Marcus Josiah Garvey Jr. (1887-1940) – the notorious Jamaican-American political entrepreneur and founder of the first Black mass movement organisation, the *United Negro Improvement Association* (UNIA) – with being "a visionary who inspired his race in its upward struggle from the degradation of centuries of slavery" (Padmore 1972b: 82), he recounted what he called the "deficiencies" of Garvey "as a leader", without the least unambiguity,

> "Nobody really believed that Garvey was an unscrupulous demagogue out to fleece the most primitive and ignorant elements of his race. He was born poor, lived moderately, and died even poorer than he was born. His faults were other than mercenary. *He was vain, arrogant, and highly sensitive to criticism. He suffered from a persecution complex and resented advice* from even his closest colleagues. *He distrusted* even the members of the »shadow cabinet« of his provisional black government. *Garvey was unable to co-operate with anyone who disagreed with him. In short, he was supremely egotistical. His egotism amounted to megalomania*; and so the men surrounding him had to be for the most part cringing sycophants. His business ventures failed more from bad management than conscious dishonesty. His Liberian colonization scheme collapsed as a consequence of his own vanity. *He was entirely without tact and diplomacy.* […] *Garvey`s vanity* was his own undoing. He made enemies where he should have cultivated friends." (Padmore 1972b [1956]: 81f., my emphases)

The danger of Garveyism as an ideological stance, however, ran much deeper than the personal shortcomings of Marcus Garvey. "Garvey admitted that his doctrine was based on racial fascism", as Padmore (1972b: 75) wrote unmistakably – before quoting Garvey in his own words from Volume II of *World`s Great Men of Colour*, an anthology edited by the Jamaican-American writer Joel Augustus Rogers (1880-1966), originally published in 1947, reprinted several times since, and still on sale. This underlines the appropriateness of his verdict very well, showing the vanity, the megalomania as well as the utter political incorrectness which Padmore ascribed to him. As Garvey claimed,

> "*We were the first Fascists*. We had disciplined men, women and children in training for the liberation of Africa. The black masses saw that *in this extreme nationalism lay their only hope*, and readily supported it. *Mussolini copied fascism from me*, but the Negro reactionaries sabotaged it." (Garvey, in Padmore 1972b: 75, my emphases)

From this I draw my first inference: Pan-Africanism was by no means uniform, not even in the post-war period when the combined efforts of global Pan-African networks and anti-colonial protagonists in the colonial territories marched hand in hand. Infighting within the Pan-African paradigm was always a factor. The question of "race" lay at the bottom of such quarrels – leading to various different schools of thoughts within the stream of 20th century Pan-African traditions.

That Garveyism – or French *négritude*, for that matter (see Sonderegger 2010: 179ff.) – was at odds with the progressive, politically internationalist strands of Pan-Africanism embodied by Padmore and shared by several leading figures of the anti-colonial nationalist movements in Africa at the time, is clear enough. It is equally clear, or should be, that the late colonial and early decolonisation era was crucially important for the ways in which Pan-Africanism was realised since then, and for how it is perceived, and re-conceptualized nowadays (see Wurzer, Adeleke and Harisch in this volume).

One English historian who looked at Pan-African prospects at an early point, George Shepperson (1962), accordingly proposed to differentiate between "Pan-Africanism" proper (with a capital "P") from the "pan-

African" variants (without) that emphasised the racial factor for unity above others. In his autobiography *Ghana*, Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) distinguished to the same effect what he called "Black nationalism" ("not born of indigenous African consciousness") from "African nationalism" (Nkrumah 1957: 53f.). His Pan-African agenda of building the United States of Africa was grounded in his understanding of "African" nationalism – expanded to a continental level (see Sonderegger 2016a: 27). It did not correspond to "Black" nationalism, which he too linked to Garveyism, although Nkrumah was quick to make use of the political opportunities promised by a Black "internationalism" for his actual policies (see Davidson 2007 [1973], Sonderegger 2016a, and Adeleke in this volume).

To exclude Garveyism from Pan-Africanism proper, as Padmore (1972b [1956]: 65-82) was inclined to do, was not, therefore, what most Pan-African activists did or wanted to do. Not then, and not now (see Frühwirth in this volume). From this I draw my second inference: Within Pan-Africanism there is a pronounced will to affirm unity even when there is none. This point is well illustrated by a "goodwill message" from Nigerian politician Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996), which was published on the occasion of the reprint of Padmore`s volume on the Pan-African Congress movement in 1963. Here Azikiwe evokes the memory of a bunch of people in alleged unity, who, at a closer look, differed in their opinions and attitudes quite radically,

> "What Africa has achieved to-day is a fitting tribute to men like J. Africanus Horton, Edward W. Blyden, Marcus A. Garvey, William E.B. Du Bois, Casely Hayford, Herbert Macauley, George Padmore and their successors who were pioneers in this great struggle to restore the pristine dignity of man in the continent of Africa." (in Padmore 1963 [1947]: ii)

The differences between these men`s opinions were pronounced on many levels. A short look on one basic Pan-African topic, the matter of "race", will do. The Sierra Leonean doctor James Africanus Beale Horton (1835-1883), for instance, argued the biological uselessness of the concept of "race" as early as 1868 (see Sonderegger 2009a: 207-211, Sonderegger 2009b: 66-69), whereas, at the very same time, Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912) immersed himself deeply into racial theories which were then popularised

not only in the Western metropolitan countries, but throughout the whole colonised world. Blyden was appropriating these ideas of racial difference, transforming them to his own ends, making them into a tool for emotional uplift and the awakening of what he called "African personality" (ibid.: 72-77). Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford (1866-1930), a lawyer and writer living in the British occupied territory of the Gold Coast, took his inspiration from Blyden in his claims for an *Ethiopia Unbound*, a book which he amply subtitled *Studies in Race Emancipation* (Casely Hayford 1969 [1911]).

But other than his mentor Blyden who had been born on the Caribbean Virgin Island of St. Thomas, come to live in West Africa (Liberia, and later Sierra Leone) only as a young adult, and been keen to intensify the African American connection to West Africa in order to "civilize" that continent, Casely Hayford saw no use for that. Instead, he rejected the arrogance of the civilizing mission arguments altogether, no matter from which source they came, regardless of it being European or African American, and claimed the leadership role in the Pan-African movement for continental Africans (Casely Hayford 1969 [1911]: 172f.). Why deal with those "*UnAfrican Americans*" (Adeleke 1998) anyway, if not for the sake of their support in overcoming colonial power over here? Geographical and cultural rootedness in Africa, therefore, clearly outplayed "race" as defining factor in Casely Hayford`s approach.

As for W.E.B. DuBois, it suffices to remember his famous prediction that "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line" (DuBois 1963: 20f.) – first stated in the *First Pan-African Conference* resolution *To the Nations of the World* in 1900 (there was no second), and again in the introduction to his book *The Souls of Black Folks* in 1903 – in order to see that "race" played a crucial role in his thought. However, and other than Garvey, or Blyden, or Casely Hayford, DuBois struggled wholeheartedly against the imminent and threatening essentialisms that come with the "race" concept. According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, he even developed his

> "own project of reclaiming and redefining »the race concept«. He sought a model of racial politics that was not Booker T. Washington`s model of subordinate development, not the difference-denying universalism of certain humanitarians […], not Bishop Henry Turner`s fantasy of separatism and emigration, not even Frederick Douglass`s »ultimate

assimilation *through* self-assertion.« Du Bois was determined to chart another way; and […] he encompassed contradiction, contained multitudes." (Appiah 2014: 6)

So did, as we have seen, George Padmore. All those mentioned, and indeed many more Pan-African activists, were concerned with the matter of racist discrimination and oppression, but there was, nevertheless, no unity with regard to the matter of "race", even less with regard to the understanding of the concept itself and its epistemological significance.

During the first half of the 20th century, these differences did not prevent Pan-African intellectual activists from forming alliances across sometimes quite broad ideological divides. This had a quite simple reason in the state of the world at that time. For as long as European empires existed and "European *metropoles*" ruled over "African *colonies*", such a claim of "unity" vis-à-vis the colonial oppressor, the stereotypical singularized "colonizer", worked well enough; but under the new conditions on the African continent slowly emerging after Word War Two – Africans, unmistakably, now ruling over fellow Africans – it was no longer the effective tool for beneficial politics it used to be. Instead, the recurrent emphasis on Pan-African "unity" by African nation-statist leaders since the 1960s became an effective tool in the hands of the new rulers for justifying all sorts and forms of policies. The so-called "new states" of the independence era – soon dubbed "post-colonial" by some, "neo-colonial" by others – became indeed very troubled and "complicated places" (Geertz 2004) in what seemed increasingly to be a "world in pieces" (Geertz 2000b; see Wurzer, Adeleke and Harisch in this volume).

Changing Perspectives in Time: Writing the History of Pan-Africanism

George Padmore wrote again extensively on roots and developments of Pan-Africanism in his last book *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle* (1956). His edition of the materials, and commentary on the Pan-African Congress movement which make him the first historian of Pan-Africanism, was therefore not his sole contribution to the historiography of Pan-Africanism. From the 1930s until his untimely death in 1959, Padmore wrote relentlessly from his position as an insider of the movement (see James 2012, Hooker 1967). Thereafter, there appeared a series of short books on the topic in the early 1960s. In the main, these new publications which

dealt with Pan-Africanism`s history, were written by Western journalists and political analysts, i.e. by outsiders, if often in sympathy with the anti-colonial movement. To mind come Philippe Decraene`s *Le Panafricanisme* (1964) in French, and Colin Legum`s *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide* (1965 [1962]) as well as Hans Kohn and Wallace Sokolsky`s *African Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (1965). These writers were mainly interested in informing public opinion on some of the roots of African nationalism and decolonisation. Their approaches were definitely "presentist", as indeed Padmore`s had been too, but they were much less "historical" in both perspective and execution as compared to Padmore`s writings, which were, after all, full of vivid and concrete descriptions, as well as informed by his acute sense of "historical materialism", and the need to do historical research from the bottom up.

The first academic historian who wrote a book on the history of Pan-Africanism was from the Federal Republic of Germany. Imanuel Geiss published his *Panafrikanismus: Zur Geschichte der Dekolonisation* in 1968, an English translation appeared six years later (Geiss 1968, Geiss 1974). In this book, he distinguishes three understandings of Pan-Africanism, emphasising either (1) racial unity, or (2) cultural unity, understood in essentially nationalistic terms, or (3) political unity. As I do not have access to the English translation, I quote from the original source in German at length, and subsequently give my slightly shortened translation,

> "1. Intellektuelle oder politische Strömungen unter Afrikanern oder Afro-Amerikanern, die Afrika, die Afrikaner und die Menschen afrikanischer Abstammung als zusammengehörig sahen. Daraus entstand ein Gefühl der Rassensolidarität und ein neues Selbstbewußtsein, das die Afro-Amerikaner auf Afrika als ihr eigentliches »Vaterland« zurückverwies, ohne daß sie deswegen unbedingt an die physische Rückkehr nach Afrika dachten.
>
> 2. Alle Ideen, die die kulturelle Einheit und die politische Unabhängigkeit Afrikas betonten oder erstrebten. Hinzu tritt der Wunsch, für Afrika den Anschluß an die moderne Entwicklung auf der Grundlage der Gleichberechtigung zu finden. Für solche Bestrebungen ist die »Erlösung« (»Redemption«) Afrikas das eine, »Africa for the Africans« das andere Schlüsselwort.

3. Ideen oder politische Bewegungen, die die politische Einheit Afrikas oder wenigstens eine enge politische Zusammenarbeit in der einen oder der anderen Form befürworteten." (Geiss 1968: 9)

This might be rendered in English as follows, with the references to the three distinctive features in understanding Pan-Africanism indicated in brackets,

"1. Intellectual currents or political movements among Africans, or Afro-Americans, that considered Africa, Africans, and people of African descent as belonging together. From this stems *a feeling of racial solidarity* and *a new kind of self-consciousness leading Afro-Americans to consider Africa as essentially their »fatherland«*, without however necessarily implying physical repatriation. *[racial unity]*

2. All ideas which emphasised or aspired to *the cultural unity* and *political independence* of Africa. Added to this was the wish to procure for Africa the modern development on equal terms, propagated under the slogans of either »redemption« or »Africa for the Africans«. *[cultural unity]*

3. Ideas or political movements which advocated the political union of Africa or, at least, close political cooperation in one form or another. *[political unity]*" (Geiss 1968: 9, my translation and emphases)

In times of decolonisation at the end of the 1960s, to the outside researcher that Geiss was, "unity" loomed large in a history of Pan-Africanism. As we have seen, "unity" was also crucial to those Pan-African activists and thinkers who felt in need of both personal and collective empowerment. Many of them used to argue their wants in reference to unity of "race" or unity of "culture", assuming such "unities" as essentially natural givens. However, to the politically engaged Pan-Africanists who were troubled by the racist implications of both the racial and the culturalist discourse, such as DuBois, Padmore, Nkrumah and others, the idea of "unity" was important too. They, however, sought to bring forward unification not by claiming that it would exist in nature (which it does not), nor by the assertion that it had once existed in the past (which it had not), but rather by developing a political vision aiming at the future. They were much less obsessed with the ideas of "race" and of "great past achievements" that seem to play such a decisive role for many with Pan-Africanist leanings, and

so they could more easily recognise, and emphasise accordingly, the two other features that are always present in the Pan-African conceptual universe.

These factors, which had as much impact on the history of Pan-Africanism as the claims for "unity", are, (1) *liberation*: liberation from colonial rule and foreign control, and (2) *equality:* the right to self-determination based in the admission of Africans` equality on every level – racial, cultural, political. During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century the struggle against racial discrimination and for equal rights, and the struggle for political participation and emancipation, have been as prominent and as important as the need for unification deemed so central to the political Pan-African activists in the 1950s and 60s, or the creed of an essentially given "pan-African unity" to the more racially inclined Pan-Africanists at all times.

The rich secondary literature on Pan-Africanism is, of course, full of references to these dimensions, but so far they have rarely been systematically discussed, at least not within a broad synthetic perspective at book-length. There have been efforts though. The best of these have focused on specific time periods, locations and topics. J. Ayodele Langley on *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900-1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (1973); Robert W. July on *The Origins of Modern Political Thought: Its Development in West Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (1969); Stephen Howe on *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* (1998); Jonathan Derrick on *African "Agitators": Militant Anticolonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939* (2008); or Tunde Adeleke on *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (1998). These are all examples of well-researched and well-executed books on particular aspects of Pan-Africanism`s history.

More extensive in scope is a book from 2003, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*, by Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, which, however, is not so much a history of Pan-Africanism but more an aggregation of loose – and, unfortunately, sometimes unreliable – biographical entries. Much more coherent is Hakim Adi`s latest attempt to come to grips with the long history of Pan-Africanism in his most recent book *Pan-Africanism: A History* (2018).

In addition to Padmore and Geiss, this, I would say, represents the third meaningful effort to write the long history of Pan-Africanism in an overall

perspective that is now available in book-form. Adi considers at least two of the three dimensions of Pan-Africanism – unity, liberty, equality – that I consider its essential components, when he writes,

> "In fact, there has never been one universally accepted definition of what exactly constitutes Pan-Africanism. … Nevertheless, most writers would agree that the phenomenon has emerged in the modern period and is concerned with the social, economic, cultural and political *emancipation* of African peoples, including those of the African diaspora." (Adi 2018: 2, my emphasis)

"Emancipation", i.e. liberation, is mentioned here explicitly; and when he quotes approvingly from the African Union newspaper, the second element – that of "unity" and "solidarity" appears,

> "Pan-Africanism is an ideology and movement that encouraged the *solidarity* of Africans worldwide. It is based on the belief that *unity* is vital to economic, social and political progress and aims to »unify and uplift« people of African descent. The ideology asserts that the fates of all African peoples and countries are intertwined. At its core, Pan-Africanism is »a belief that African peoples both on the continent and in the diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny.«" (*AU Echo*, Issue 5, 27.01.2013, quoted in Adi 2018:1, my emphases)

The third dimension – the claim for "equality" – is certainly missing here where Adi (2018) is developing his definition of Pan-Africanism, though he addresses several of the implications of global inequalities in course of his book. Yet his definition remains extremely "vague". He tries to include almost everything in his account of Pan-Africanism`s history, often in a very cursory manner. He presents a lot of information from various sources amply demonstrating the sheer abundance of African continental and diasporan activism through the times, but overall his narrative comes without convincing analysis. He recognises all sorts of ambivalences, crosscurrents and contradicting stances in the positions of the vast array of protagonists he portrays in his book; contradictions, which frustrate the kind of "unity" that Adi, however, assumes nonetheless. His treatment fails

to systematically account for the intertwined roles which the factors of "unity", "liberty" and "equality" played in Pan-African historical developments. Hakim Adi, who is a well-known Pan-African intellectual activist in the UK, still holds on to a racially grounded idea of "unity" way too much – just like the bourgeois historian Imanuel Geiss did 50 years earlier. He overemphasises "unity" over "liberty", and certainly over "equality".

These are serious shortcomings in an otherwise very valuable book. It is valuable, because it shows the remarkable diversity of Pan-Africanisms, especially since the mid-20th century, in an exemplary density and within less than 300 pages. Therefore, it should serve more as a stimulus for more and deeper research into the topic than an excuse to stop any further historical engagement. My third inference therefore comes as a recommendation as well as a challenge: Writing the history of Pan-Africanism in yet another perspective.

Sketches of a Different Approach in Order to Make Sense of Pan-Africanism`s History

The following section contains glimpses into my perspective. It starts from Hakim Adi`s (2018: 2) observation that "Pan-Africanism emerged in the modern period". Following in the wake of what is conventionally termed by historians "the early modern age" which is closely linked to the seafaring and colonising activities oversees since the 15th century, "the modern age" set in only in the second half of the 18th century. This is when *the Modern World* was *born* as Christopher Bayly (2004) put it succinctly in his critically acclaimed global history book of the same name (see also Hobsbawm 1996 [1962], Osterhammel 2009). The historians of Pan-Africanism date its beginnings recurrently to 1787, the start of organised abolitionism in both Britain and the Americas as well as of the Sierra Leone colonisation project (Geiss 1968: 31-39, 1969: 187, Adi/ Sherwood 2003, Adi 2018: 7-12; see also Frühwirth in this volume). Hence Pan-Africanism clearly is a modern phenomenon. It appeared in the modern age.

Moreover, Pan-Africanism is a particular modern ideology, both in content and in form. As is clear from its early links to the abolitionist concern and movement (Drescher 2009: 217f., 219-241), right from the start it was evolving by using modern means of communication (print culture, postal service etc.) and modern modes of organisation (petitioning pressure

groups, club associations, unions, political parties); and its discourse revolved around the "revolutionary", emancipatory ideas of the day. Although Pan-African thought and action emerged in the diasporan contexts, the idea soon crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and evolved among Western-educated and repatriated African people along the shores of Africa in particular ways (see Geiss 1968, July 1969, Langley 1973, Sonderegger 2009b). Right from the start, then, Pan-Africanism had a global dimension, and this "globality" is again a feature marking its modernity.

From this follows, firstly, that the history of Pan-Africanism should be linked much more closely than is usually done to global history. It would be most promising to look at it in connection with the historical study of nationalism along the social constructivist lines developed in the works of Benedict Anderson (2006 [1983], 2013 [2005]) and Eric Hobsbawm (1992 [1990]). There is no Pan-Africanism without nationalism. So far, work in this vein has been done by only a few writers, such as Christian Mährdel (1994), Jonathan Derrick (2008) and Arno Sonderegger (2010, 2011, 2016b), or, using a slightly different approach but asking similar questions, by Holger Weiss in his effort of *Framing a Radical African Atlantic* (2014) and, with a pronounced focus on decolonization and the Cold War, by Leslie James (2015).

Secondly, the history of Pan-Africanism should also be viewed not only under the lens of anti-racism and anti-colonial resistance, which is quite common, but in consideration of the – complex and highly ambivalent – developments of global racist discourse. During the last two hundred years, all people – the dominant as well as the dominated – could not help but act under the spell of racial thoughts. Racial discourse was globalised indeed. As is well-known, racial theories have been appropriated more than once in the past to challenge and counteract racist discrimination by so-called subalterns – from Edward Wilmot Blyden to Cheikh Anta Diop and beyond. They could not do that without recourse to racial categories and racial thinking.

Instead of assuming (wrongly) that the mind-set of individual Pan-Africanists must be – or always was – non-racist, or politically anti-colonial (or anti-imperialist even), I propose looking at it within the context of colonial history. As shown in his marvellous book *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (1987), Ghanaian historian Adu Boahen (1932-2006) set a vantage point from which to discern vivid African agency under colonial conditions

– without falling in the trap of simple-minded, clear-cut oppositions of a Black-White-divide, discussing African agency in terms of either "resisters" or "collaborators" (Boahen 1989 [1987]). Following such an easy-going binary code is perhaps morally attractive, but factually inconsistent and perceptually misleading. Taking into account the results of African and Africanist historical research of the last 40 years or so (as summarised by Frederick Cooper [2014], for instance, in his recent DuBois lectures), and taking into account the findings of thinkers like Kwame Anthony Appiah (2018), leads to new insights. This is because they open up avenues for leaving essentialism behind. As is well known, and an epistemologically well underpinned fact: essentially, there are no essences. This is more than just a pun. In the cultural realities encompassing humans – as men and women are "suspended in [those] webs of significance [t]he[y] [them]sel[ves] ha[ve] spun" (Geertz 2000a [1973]: 5) and are spinning further through leading their lives – there just are no natural givens, but dynamic processes in permanent fluidity (see Sahlins 2008).

When approached in such anti-essentialist perspective, which is in harmony with a genuine historical perspective, several attitudes of Pan-Africanists who seem unintelligible at first glance, are suddenly understandable; and one can propose and discuss plausible explanations for their actions. The habit of ignoring uncomfortable facts, or even rejecting them out of hand, which is as common among adherents of Pan-Africanism as it is among believers in other-worldly creeds, can be checked and overcome. No matter whether it is the case of "pro-colonials" (such as the first African deputy to the French *Assemblée nationale*, Senegalese Blaise Diagne [1872-1934], or Edward Blyden for most of his life), or the cases of those who sought to achieve reforms within the existing imperial borders, which they accepted (like Nnamdi Azikiwe until the later 1940s) or even embraced (like Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford, when establishing his *National Congress of British West Africa* in 1919), solid explanations for actions and stances such as these are in reach. Even the disturbing attitudes of those who imagined themselves in imperial terms as leaders, or "president" of the "African empire" (as Marcus Garvey did), become less mysterious even though they may remain unacceptable on moral grounds. However, getting at these insights requires giving up the tendency – epistemologically untenable anyway – of pressing for "unity" and conformity where there evidently was no such thing. This, a logical necessity to the impartial researcher, does not

appeal to the perhaps dogmatically inclined activist, but that is the way to further our insights on the phenomenon in question.

Within the overall perspective just sketched, it would be interesting to intertwine more closely the history of Pan-African intellectual activism with the history of modern political categories – liberalism, socialism, fascism – that are rooted in the particularities of European history, but went global during the 20th century. Besides global histories of nationalism and racial discourses, and studies reflective of the ambiguities and complexities of the so-called "colonial situation", this is a third field of interest, which I consider prolific for further investigation. Looking at the history of Pan-Africanism in terms of a modern phenomenon does require taking into consideration all three dimensions mentioned so far: the global, the colonial and the metropolitan – in their entanglements and crosscurrents.
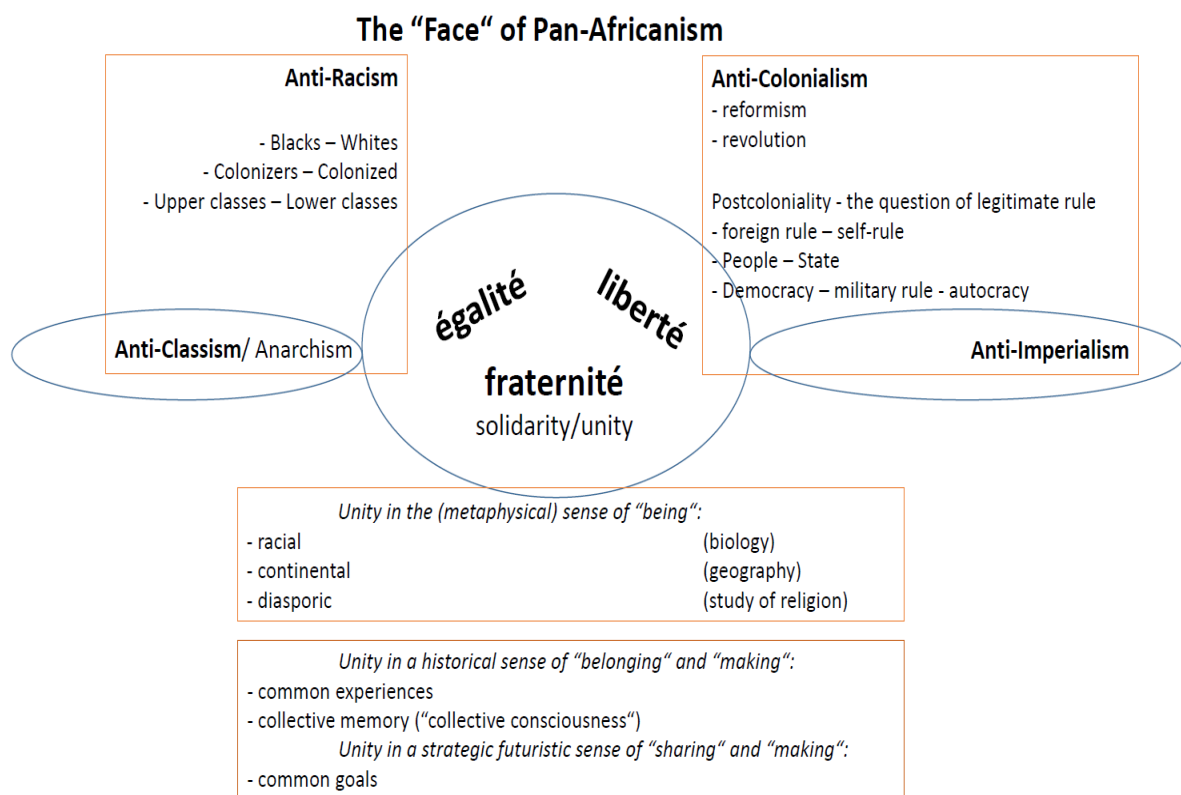
To take serious the fact that Pan-Africanism is a "modern" phenomenon leads to accept several ultimate premises,

(1) Pan-Africanism is a historical phenomenon, embedded in specific times and spaces, featuring specific traits and aspects, given to particular views and purposes.

(2) It is not based in nature, or in any given natural essence. That is, Pan-Africanism cannot be explained by recourse to "race", though it did emerge out of a world deeply entrenched in racial thought and structured accordingly. As the concept of "race" was only developed in the (early) modern age, Pan-Africanism – or "Pan-negroism" as DuBois had called it first, as early as 1897 – could not be conceptualised in any other way but in racial terms. Again, this illustrates its modern character. It does not mean that "race" is grounded in (natural) reality. "Race" matters, of course, because it is used in many social contexts as if it were real, based in nature, but it is, nevertheless and in fact, nothing more than a particular, historical contingent "idea" (see Appiah 2018, Hund 2007).

(3) Modernity is no timeless universal category either: It is time-specific. Pan-Africanism, as one of modernity`s ideological children, is based in specific historical settings and particular collective experiences (see Wa Thiong`o 2009). Prominent among those are plantation slavery and the Atlantic Slave Trade, racist discrimination of people of colour at home and abroad, imperial conquest and colonial rule.

Seen from this angle, the history of Pan-Africanism becomes one where subjected people revolt against injustices and wrongs dominating the world.

They do so in a semantic mode that itself is hyper-modern. Their arguments are rooted in three values made prominent by the French revolution: *égalité, liberté, fraternité*. These are values inspiring all revolutionary action since (see Soboul 2010 [1965], Hobsbawm 1996 [1962]); and applying them more systematically than hitherto has been done would allow for a more conclusive depiction of Pan-Africanism's intellectual history (see Sonderegger 2016b).

What follows is a visualisation of a work in progress, of what I would like to call, for the present purpose, the "face" of Pan-Africanism:

The "Face" of Pan-Africanism

Anti-Racism

- Blacks – Whites
- Colonizers – Colonized
- Upper classes – Lower classes

Anti-Classism/ Anarchism

Anti-Colonialism
- reformism
- revolution

Postcoloniality - the question of legitimate rule
- foreign rule – self-rule
- People – State
- Democracy – military rule - autocracy

Anti-Imperialism

égalité   *liberté*

fraternité

solidarity/unity

Unity in the (metaphysical) sense of "being":
- racial   (biology)
- continental   (geography)
- diasporic   (study of religion)

Unity in a historical sense of "belonging" and "making":
- common experiences
- collective memory ("collective consciousness")
  Unity in a strategic futuristic sense of "sharing" and "making":
- common goals

The "nose" in the centre is illustrative of the three paramount values of modern political discourse: "equality", "liberty", "fraternity". In particular, the last of these values led to the various concepts for unification so important in the history of Pan-Africanism – be it nationality and the nation-state, or various other more or less inclusive-exclusive forms of claiming *Brotherhood* and/or *Sisterhood* that have been proposed since. The "eyes" of Pan-Africanism represent the two basic goals of Pan-African activism: anti-racism and anti-colonialism. The "ears" mark the extremer conclusions to which anti-racism and anti-colonialism lead, namely rejecting the very idea of acceptable inequality and rule by others. My shorthand for

these radical implications is anti-imperialism and anti-classism or anarchism. The "mouth" and "lips" represent the means through which solidarity and teamwork shall emerge, and set the goals and visions the Pan-African agenda wants to accomplish. Here, in particular, "unity" looms large.

Conclusion

Along these lines, three versions of Pan-Africanism can be distinguished for the 20th century.

(1) First, there was a liberal and partly conservative wing of Pan-Africanism epitomised by DuBois` congress movement, which met four times between 1919 and 1927, and sought to enter into dialogue with Western ruling elites – both in the imperial metropoles and at the newly founded *League of Nations*. The orientation of its leading activist was both internationalist and elitist.

(2) Second, in form of the *United Negro Improvement Association* (UNIA) there was a much more socially radical, ultra-nationalist organisation with sometimes right-wing leanings available in the fight against white racism and oppression of people of colour. Founded by Marcus Garvey in 1914, in the 1920s the UNIA had a positive impact on many more people`s lives than the activities of the Congresses. It had a big influence in North America and the Caribbean, and even reached out to the continental shores of Africa via diasporan networks, though, in comparison, it remained peripheral there. The political orientation of its leading activist was nationalist, separatist and segregationist.

(3) Third, there emerged a left-wing Pan-Africanism in course of the 1920s, which launched radical critiques on European colonial rule and Western imperialism, and challenged racial discrimination and social inequalities in profound ways. This movement`s protagonists, chief among them George Padmore, emphasised that "class" mattered much more in determining actual discrimination than "race". Racial discrimination, they argued, was not really a matter of "race" but one of "class": of standing, of influence, and of the uneven distribution of wealth – all of which allows "racism" and racial discrimination to flourish.

All three strands of thought survived into the second half of the 20th century. However, it was the third version, left-wing Pan-Africanism that raised to prominence since the later 1930s, and that dominated both the *Fifth*

Pan-African Congress at Manchester in October 1945 and the national liberation struggles in the African colonies of the 1950s and 60s. It lost ground, however, under the prevailing conditions of the global Cold War in course of the decades that followed. In some circles, it became common wisdom to discredit this emancipatory Pan-Africanism as being Soviet-style or Soviet-led communism henceforth.

Such anti-communism, which was reinforced once again when the USSR finally dissolved, brought forth the final dissolution of any "unity" with regard to Pan-Africanism that might have been left among African political leaders and activists. In their efforts to gain national independence, many leaders of anti-colonial movements had been quick to leave the radical Pan-African alliance from very early on (see Wurzer in this volume). A political Pan-African vision, which had barely survived the earlier onslaught of the balkanizing nationalist policies supported by the Western powers and eagerly carried out by several postcolonial African regimes, was further discredited after the fall of the Eastern bloc by adherents of neoliberal and neoconservative creeds.

Anti-communism, however, was firmly rooted in Western political elites` minds. It had been there long before the so-called Cold War took off in the aftermath of World War Two. Indeed, anti-communism got well established right from the moment when the Russian Revolution allowed the Bolsheviki to assume power in Russia in 1917 and establish the *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (USSR) in 1922 (see Carr 1973 [1953], Hobsbawm 2003 [1994]: 54-84, Hobsbawm 2011, Kershaw 2016: 108-114, 160-165). Among other things, it had been the promise of "world revolution" that made communism and the USSR attractive to various middle class people in the colonies all over Asia in particular, as well as among "proletarians" almost everywhere else – which, however, in most countries meant industrial and urban workers rather than peasants.

When the Soviet leadership began its retreat from the cause of "world revolution" to solidify around Russian state-nationalism – in a process starting slowly as early as 1921/22, but accelerating under Stalin`s dictatorial leadership since 1927 (Carr 1973: 232-271, 381-421) – this was not immediately recognisable to its sympathizers in countries and colonies far away; the less so as the *Comintern* (short for *Communist International*) which had been launched in 1919, as an international communist organisation to promote "world revolution", continued to exist until eventually dissolved

by Stalin in 1941 (see Carr 1982). When Pan-African members of the *Comintern* such as George Padmore realised this wind of change in its agenda, they opted out. Lessons learned, they kept to their acquired knowledge, Marxist as it was, but they now searched for different routes to struggle against the dominant powers and, more important even, for a way to enter into dialogue with the mass of people suffering under the colonial yoke (Sonderegger 2015: 192-201).

Because of the agricultural character of most of the colonized world, the communist appeal had been limited to a very thin stratum of colonial society indeed, namely the educated elite who, up to the changes in the wake of World War Two, and as against the so-called "traditional" elite of indigenous stock, were effectively kept away from participating in the political machinery of the colonies. The question arose for Pan-Africanists of Padmore`s kind, how to transform this state of affairs and bring about changes in the relations of power. The agrarian fact is the reason why there did never develop an African communist mass movement in any part of sub-Saharan Africa in the first half of the 20th century (see Hobsbawm 2003 [1994]: 199-222). However, for some decades at least, the USSR and Marxism have had a positive reputation among many of the politically engaged Africans – for they seemed to represent a firm anti-imperialist stance and an alternative to the system under which the colonised sighed. Indeed, this gave left-wing Pan-Africanism some of its popular appeal in the 1930s, 40s and 50s even, before it ebbed down and began losing ground since the very early 1960s – only to be upheld since by some African intellectuals remote from the decisive institutions of power (see Harisch in this volume).

When, in 1963, the *Organisation of African Unity* (OAU) was launched instead of the "United States of Africa" that George Padmore (1956) had envisioned and Kwame Nkrumah (1963) had made plans for in more concrete terms (see Sonderegger 2016a) this event marked a return of the pro-Western liberal and conservative strands of the Pan-African tradition that have had a first organisational life in the form of the first four Pan-African Congresses staged in the 1920s. Their discourse dominated the inter-state Pan-Africanism officially represented by government and diplomatic staff in formally celebrated meetings for the next decades. "African Socialism" might have been used from time to time, by almost every leader of African states, from Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001) to Kenneth Kaunda (born 1924) to Yoweri Museveni (born 1944), but it served

mainly to shock their Western counterparts. It was hardly ever more than a rhetorical feat. As long as the Cold War shaped global politics, this could make sense, but declarations of allegiance and friendship to the communist bloc, or renaming one`s country in terms of a *People`s Republic,* or deploying the myth of a communalist African nature to justify the idleness of the political elite, did not – or at any event, only in very rare cases – mean progressive left-wing policies destined to improve the lot of the many at home. They were not the real thing. They often served as distraction without further ado. Although the African Renaissance debates of the 1990s stimulated the intellectual debate again, the *African Union* which replaced the OAU in 2001/02 does seem neither radical nor left-wing in its policies and visions.

There have been efforts to revitalise the radicalism of the Manchester-moment by a variety of Pan-African activists, some of them more intellectual than others, time and time again (see Adi 2018: 185-206, 213-220). There was a *Sixth Pan-African Congress* in Dar-es-Salaam in 1974, and a *Seventh Pan-African Congress* was held in Kampala in 1994. Both signalled efforts to radicalise and concretise the Pan-African vision once more. And this is no mean feat (see Adi 2018: 182ff., 208-213). But it is true to say in retrospect that they were not effective – and, at least, in one important respect there are negative consequences which increased in the wake of these conference meetings which brought many diasporan Pan-Africanists to the continent for the first time of their life. "Race"-based attitudes, it seems to me, have become stronger within the realms of Pan-African debates since, especially during the last few decades.

Alarming too – and a sign of the relative obscurity of much contemporary Pan-Africanism – is the recent dispute between quarrelling factions of conference organisers about who is rightfully speaking for the Pan-African agenda. Recently, there happened to be staged not only one but two so-called *Eighth Pan-African Congresses* which, however, do not respect each other (see Adi 2018: 213). One, hosted in Accra in the fall of 2014, represented more the governmental, nation-statist, moderate stream – directed at both the continental and the diasporan levels. The other took place in Johannesburg in January 2014, and was, as it seems, a private and entrepreneurial initiative with a racist outlook. It was targeting at blacks only, and consequently excluded not only conceptually the whole of North Africa but denied Pan-Africanists from there the right to attend the meeting.

What is missed today is the progressive vision of Pan-Africanism which was rooted in a profound analysis of power and class relations and in a globally informed view of Africa in the world (see, for instance, Padmore 1969 [1936], Padmore 1972a [1937], DuBois 2007 [1946], Padmore 1949, Nkrumah 1965). That progressive vision was already there. It can be re-discovered, it can be unearthed. To tackle these progressive traditions in Pan-Africanism is rewarding, not only for its own sake or for the entertainment of those interested in the past, but for contemporary Pan-African intellectual activists as well. The writings and actions of the past provide an arsenal of rare richness to inform contemporary Pan-African intellectual activists. Ideas matter.

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