

## PAN-AFRICANISM: Ideology behind the Organization of African Unity (OAU)

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The end of colonialism led to the rise of a large number of independent states in Asia and Africa in the post World War II period. The phenomenon of decolonization had such an impact on the post war world order that actually changed the very content and character of world politics. The emergence of independent Africa was particularly striking in this respect as the continent was, until then, largely absent from the world scene. What made the advent of independence in Africa, further, an extraordinary development was its rapid speed. The 'wind of change' blew with an speed that made the change itself nowhere' as great and significant as' in Africa.

During 1960s, the thirty-three African countries got the independent status.<sup>1</sup> So, 1960s can rightly be termed as "a decade of independence". The 1960s also saw the emergence of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) a concrete realization of the Pan-African aspirations of African nationalists since the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Its establishment in 1963 was a landmark in Africa's history which opened new vistas in the political and economic life of Africa.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Africa of 1960s was certainly the most exciting place on earth.<sup>4</sup> Earlier, freedom and independence, economic and political self-determination were only hollow words or a distant goals for Africans. Now for the first time, they had achieved the status of free men proudly directing their own destinies according to their own choice.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Africa South of the Sahara* 2002, 31st ed. Europa Publications, London, p.25

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Mathews K, "The OAU and Regional Cooperation in Africa" in Vohra, N.N. and Mathews, K.(ed) – *Africa, India and South-South Cooperation*, Har Anand Publication Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1997, p.207

<sup>3</sup> Malakar, Subodh N., OAU – "Failures, Achievements and Prospects" in *World Focus*, No.243, March 2000, p.11

<sup>4</sup> Adera, Teshome (ed) – *Nationalist Leaders and African Unity*, Published by The Ethiopian National Patriotic Association, 1963, p.141

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.141

The OAU, a mouthpiece of African people, was born on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1963 with the fundamental aim of promoting African unity and liberating the continent from the clutches of colonialism and racism.<sup>6</sup> Continental in its scope, the OAU had gradually bound as many as 53 African States, representing diverse historical and cultural backgrounds through a vibrant thread of Pan-Africanism.<sup>7</sup>

### **Pan-Africanism: Meaning**

Pan-Africanism does not lend itself to simple or precise definition; it is a pantechicon for the convenient assembly of related ideas.<sup>8</sup> It has cultural, intellectual, economic and political aspects and a complex and varied historical evolutions. Colin Legum defined Pan-Africanism as “a movement of ideas and emotions, at times it achieves synthesis; at times it remains at the level of thesis and antithesis. In one sense, Pan-Africanism can be likened to Socialism; in another sense it can be likened to World Federation, Atlantic Union or Federal Europe; each allows for great scope of interpretation in its practical application and yet, in its deepest sense, Pan-Africanism is different from all these movements in that it is exclusive.”<sup>9</sup>

He, again explained “if Capitalism is a belief in private enterprise, if Socialism is a belief in a planned economy to achieve social equality, if World Federation is a belief in a form of world government limiting the sovereignty of nations, if Zionism is a belief in a Jewish National State in Palestine – then Pan-Africanism can be similarly simplified into a belief in the uniqueness and spiritual unity of black people; an acknowledgment of their right to self determination in Africa, and to be treated with dignity as equals in all parts of the world.”<sup>10</sup> In the words of George Padmore, one of its major interpreters’ “Pan-Africanism offers an ideological alternative to Communism on the one hand and Tribalism on the other hand. It rejects both white racialism and black chauvinism. It stands for racial co-existence as the basis of absolute equality and respect for human personality.”<sup>11</sup> According to the African political Dictionary, “Pan-Africanism is a belief that existing states ought to merge into a single state. Pan-Africanist

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<sup>6</sup> *OAU Charter and Rules of Procedure*, Published by OAU General Secretariat, August 1992, Ethiopia, p.4

<sup>7</sup> Harshe, Rajen - 'OAU, its work and achievements' in *World Focus*, OAU-Going Strong at 25, No. 111-112, March April 1989, p.3

<sup>8</sup> Legum, Colin, (ed) *Africa – A Handbook to the Continent*, London, 1961, p.452

<sup>9</sup> Legum, Colin, *Pan-Africanism – A Short Political Guide*, Fredrick A. Praeger Publishers, New York, 1963, p.14

<sup>10</sup> Legum, Colin, (ed) *Africa, A Handbook to the Continent*, op.cit., p.452

<sup>11</sup> Padmore, George, *Pan-Africanism or Communism : The Coming Struggle for Africa*, New York 1956, p.379

believe that there are sufficient common cultural characteristic among the hundreds of African societies to justify creating one huge African State to replace the existing ones.”<sup>12</sup> But there is no agreement that how this grand concept might be achieved.

### **Ideas and Principles behind the Pan-Africanism**

- Pan-Africanism stresses on the promotion of solidarity among people belonging to the black race all over the world;
- Pan-Africanism based on colour-consciousness and race consciousness means pride in being black;
- Pan-Africanism stresses upon the development of African personality; a determination to recast African society into its own forms, drawing from its own past. What is valuable and desirable and marrying it to modern ideas. Modernism is heavily accentuated;
- Total rejection of colonialism in all its forms, not only in Africa but also all over the world;
- Rejection of violence as a method of struggle, unless peaceful methods of struggle – positive action – are met with military repression;
- Pan-Africanism stresses on African unity
- Pan-Africanism stresses on African nationalism in place of tribalism.
- Belief in democracy as the most desirable method of government based on the principle of ‘one man one vote’;
- African regeneration of economic enterprise; to replace colonial economic methods; belief in a non-exploiting socialist or communalistic type of socialism; International Communism is rejected.
- Positive neutrality, non-involvement in power politics, but neutral in nothing that affects African interests.<sup>13</sup>

In the ideology of Pan-Africanism embodied two related but distinct concept of ‘Negritude’ and ‘African Personality’. Negritude, a concept that Black Africans by virtue of their race and enculturation see, feel, sense and value differently from other peoples and share among themselves an unconscious, physiological experience of blackness denied to other humans.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The African Political Dictionary, by Phillips, Claude S., Western Michigan University, Oxford, England, 1984, pp.78-79

<sup>13</sup> Legum, Colin, *Pan-Africanism, a Short Political Guide*, op.cit., pp.38-39

<sup>14</sup> The African Political Dictionary, op.cit., p.77

The poets like Aime Cesaire, David Diop, Leon Damas and Langston Hughes, all talked about Negritude. Lepold Sedar Senghor, who later become the first president of Senegal, is a best known exponent of Negritude.

The second is a concept of 'African Personality'. While embodying the sense of pride in being black, incorporated the additional idea that Africans has its unique contribution to make to the world. The distinguished West Indian, Edward Blyden, first applied the term of 'African Personality'.<sup>15</sup> Later, it was expounded by Kwame Nkrumah.

### **Origin of Pan-Africanism and its Growth in Diaspora**

The resistance to enslavement, whether in Africa or in the western world, created the basis for the formation of organizations and concepts out of which was born the idea of Pan-Africanism<sup>16</sup> (Currently meaning African unity in political, economic and social sense). The idea of Pan-Africanism, firstly developed by the Africans of the diaspora such as DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Casley Hayford etc.

The first Pan-African Conference was organized by a West Indian barrister, Henry Sylvester Williams of Trinidad in 1900 in London. This meeting attracted the attention, put the word "Pan-African" in the dictionaries for the first time and had some 30 delegates mainly from England and West Indies with a few colored North Americans.<sup>17</sup> Its aims were to act as a forum of protest against the aggressiveness of white colonists, to bring the people of African descent throughout the world into closer touch with each other, and to start a movement which would secure to all African races living in civilized countries their full rights and would promote their business interests.<sup>18</sup> The main aims of the Conference made it clear that they only demanded the protection of rights of Africans, but not the self government for them.

### **Marcus Garvey**

Marcus Aurelius Garvey, born on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1887, was a Jamaican. He founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Lagos, Nigeria in 1920. Some of its objectives were to establish a universal confraternity among the race, to assist in the development of

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<sup>15</sup> Legum, C., *Pan-Africanism*, op.cit., p.20

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, V.B., *Africa and Unity : The Evolution of Pan-Africanism*, Longman Group Ltd., London, 1969, p.19

<sup>17</sup> DuBois, W.E.B. *The World and Africa*, International Publishers, New York, 1947, p.7

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.7

independent Negro nations and communities, to establish commisionaries or agencies in principal countries and cities of the world, for the representation of all Negroes, to work for better conditions among Negroes everywhere etc.<sup>19</sup> The Association organized many conventions held in New York, become a valuable platform for popularizing his 'African Redemption Scheme' and for giving expression to Negro aspirations for race redemption and regeneration, used the slogans "Africa for Africans", "Renaissance of the Black Race", "Ethiopia Awake up, you mighty race". The motto of his organization was 'One God, One aim, One Destiny.'<sup>20</sup> Some Negro politicians wanted to destroy the organization but their efforts failed. Slowly, it grew in strength and become the best organized mass Negro association in America.<sup>21</sup>

### **DuBoisian Congresses**

William Edward Burghordt DuBois was born at Great Barrington, Massachusetts USA on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1868.<sup>22</sup> DuBois is known as the father of Pan-Africanism. DuBois not only cooperated with the white dominated National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, but sought that organization's advice and support before embarking on his Pan-African Congresses.<sup>23</sup> Through his efforts, four Pan-African Congresses were held in 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927. These were known as DuBoisian Congresses. The first and second Congress played an important part in the growth of Pan-African idea while the succeeding two were disappointing. DuBois oriented Pan-Africanism to mean self-determination.

### **Differences between Marcus Garvey and DuBois**

The aim of DuBois was to secure for Africans the right to participate in the government of their respective countries or the application of the mandatory or trusteeship system where the people were deemed unready for self-rule. On the other hand, Garvey sought to unite all Africans the world over, to establish a bridgehead on the continent of Africa from which to fight colonialism and weld the whole of Africa into a united nation.<sup>24</sup>

Their methods were also different. DuBois wanted that Negro should be trained for leadership, research and scholarly studies should be carried on regarding the conditions of

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<sup>19</sup> Cited in Thompson, V.B., op.cit, p. 38

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp.37-38

<sup>21</sup> Ajala, A, *Pan-Africanism: Evolution, Progress and Prospects*, Great Britain, 1973, p.5

<sup>22</sup> Padmore, op.cit., p.106

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Ajala, op.cit., p.6

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, V.B., op.cit., p. 42

'Negroes' in USA and the information, thus collected should be distributed and Congresses should be used as a medium for discussions among Africans and people of African descent.<sup>25</sup> On the other side, Garvey wanted to adopt practical policies for achieving his goal of Negro unity in the African homeland. He used his International Conventions to rally the downtrodden Negro folk and as a forum for the ventilation of Negro grievances. Another was his 'Back to Africa' scheme, he wished that a select number of Negroes should be taken from the western hemisphere and transplanted in Africa.

### **The African Efforts**

Some African intellectuals like Adeoye Deniga of Nigeria, Joseph Casely Hayford of the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Ladipo Solanke of Nigeria were also advocating African unity. Adeoye Deniga formulated his ideas on African unity mostly confined to West African Unity and published in a pamphlet entitled. "The Need for West African Federation."<sup>26</sup> Joseph Casely Hayford founded the National Congress of British West Africa in March 1920. He tried to promote cooperation among African in four British dependencies in Africa such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Gambia and Gold Coast (Ghana).

Another West African personality, Ladipo Solanke formed the West African Students Union (WASU) in 1924 in London. The full support was provided to the activities of the National Congress of British West Africa by WASU. They worked in close cooperation with each other. The WASU hostel become a center of discussions for students and people from Africa and people of African descent from America and Britain. Although, the union continued to function away from the African political scene, it was a breeding ground for African sentiments against European rule in Africa.<sup>27</sup> The International African Service Bureau was set up in 1937 and this was the forrunner of the Pan-African Federation. Its aim was to promote the well being and unity of African people and people of African descent throughout the world. Under the auspices of the International Service Bureau, the Pan-African Federation was formed in 1944. The aims of the Federation were to demand the self-determination and independence, equality of rights for African people as well as total abolition of all forms of racial discrimination.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.44

<sup>26</sup> Ajala, op.cit., p.7

<sup>27</sup> Thompson, V.B., op.cit., p.31

## Manchester Congress 1945

The Pan-African Federation organized the fifth Pan-African Conference in 1945 in Manchester. A large number of Africans participated, some of them were Kwame Nkrumah, J. Annan, E.A. Ayikumi, Edwin J. Duplan, Kurankji Taylor, Joe Appiah, Graft Johnson, H.O. Davies, S.L. Akintola, Raphael Armattoo etc. For the first time, Pan-Africanism and nationalism were fully discussed and the necessity for well-organized firmly knit movements as primary condition for the success of the national liberation struggle in Africa was stressed.<sup>28</sup>

The Conference adopted two declarations, one was 'Declaration to Colonial Powers' and other was the 'Declaration to the Colonial People'. The Declaration to Colonial Powers demanded for black Africa, 'autonomy and independence'. The Declaration to the Colonial People called the workers and farmers of the colonies to awaken to their responsibilities so that they would be able to achieve independence.<sup>29</sup>

By the efforts of Kwame Nkrumah, the west African delegates to the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Congress were organized into a regional committee called 'West African National Secretariat', to work out ways and means to implement the decisions of the Manchester Congress.<sup>30</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Congress was a melting point between the intellectualism of DuBois and West African Students Union on the one hand and the mass movement of Garvey on the other.<sup>31</sup> The agreement was reached on the principles of Pan-Africanism between these two diverse forces. It was the beginning of new era in the Pan-Africanism. The nature of Pan-Africanism had changed from the protest movement of the people of African descent from US, Britain, West Indies and Africa, to a tool in the hands of nationalists of the African continent. In short, they had linked 'Pan-Africanism' with 'Nationalism'. Thus, the idea of Pan-Africanism as a belief in African unity emerged with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and dominated the thinking of Africans for many decades before the independence era was dawn on the African continent.

Pan-Africanism as an ideology is a reflection of the feelings of the people of Africa against their humiliation and ruthless exploitation as well as their desire for unity. As a unifying

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<sup>28</sup> Ajala, op.cit., p.11

<sup>29</sup> 'The Pan-African Congress, Manchester, 1945, resolutions in Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism A Short Political Guide*, op.cit., pp. 135-137.

<sup>30</sup> Padmore, op.cit., p.172

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, V.B., op.cit., p. 59

idea to inspire the faith, confidence and energy to transform Africa, it has great potentiality for good. If its racist aspects were to grow it could produce evil.<sup>32</sup> But whatever its future, Pan-Africanism in the past was a natural Negro reaction to centuries of dominations and humiliation by whites<sup>33</sup>, a wish to create common bond among all people of Negro stock, to establish a greater sense of oneness, a political belonging between the isolated uprooted communities of the diaspora first with each other, then with Africa and to rediscover their lost past. Now, it is mostly confined to the people of the African continent and stands for a call for African unity against such forces as imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. It means its contents have changed since its inception.

In short, Pan-Africanism emerged as a protest movement of Negroes of America and West Indies against racism, gradually crystallized into an ideology of social and political action of dependent people of Africa against colonial rule as well as the establishment of a Supranational Entity (a United States of Africa), including all independent states of Africa. The idea of Pan-Africanism was largely successful, not only in creating the OAU but still continuously engaged in achieving co-operation in political and economic field. It is evident from the fact that the membership of OAU expanded very fast, started with thirty members, its membership reached to 53 in 1994. It was the largest regional group in the world. In the midst of several short lived inter-state organizations of the third world, the OAU has displayed a remarkable durability and viability.<sup>34</sup> What is behind this durability and viability?, is a feeling of oneness that 'we are Africans' or the idea of Pan-Africanism means 'all Africa', 'a united Africa'. Pan-African ideology is a great force among African masses, yet it is given to varying interpretations and formations in practice. This is nowhere as evident as in the process of the formation of the first African Continental Association called OAU. It is because of this great force that OAU was able to transform itself into African Union.

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<sup>32</sup> Mckay, Vernon - *Africa and World Politics*, Harper and Raw Publishers, New York, 1963, p.93

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.93

<sup>34</sup> Harshe, R., op.cit., p. 3