Chapter 6

Culture and Communication as Pre-requisites for Pan-Africanism in a Globalising World

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Since many of the descendants of these Negro slaves knew little about Africa, when they thought of Africa, it was as one great country in which all black people lived together, happy and free. It is this view of Africa without frontiers or divisions that may have inspired the idea of 'One United Africa'.

However, the first organised political expression of Pan-Africanism occurred in 1900. The initiative for this went to Henry Sylvester Williams, a lawyer from Trinidad, who convened the first Pan-Africa conference ever held. A few representatives from Africa participated at this conference, while others came from both America and the West Indies. Most were students living in England. Among these, was Dr William E. Burghardt DuBois, described as an outstanding Negro Scholar and writer, who became the 'father' and prophet of Pan-Africanism. Speaking at the turn of the 20th century, DuBois, is credited with the following famous lines:

_The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men of Asia, in the America and the islands of the sea._ (Anene et al 1966:529).
DuBois was born in the USA in 1868 and died in Ghana in 1963. He was one of the founders of the National Association of the Advancement of Coloured Peoples (NAACP) which inspired the struggle for Civil rights of Negro in America. Under his leadership, Pan-African congresses were held.

Another significant figure rooted in Pan-Africanism was Marcus Garvey whom Nkrumah claimed to have greatly influenced him. Garvey however disagreed with DuBois over the future of the Negroes outside Africa. While DuBois believed that Negroes in the New World should fight to establish their rights in 'exile', Garvey insisted that their only future lay in returning to Africa. Bitter though the rivalry was between Garvey and DuBois it was by no means sterile. Negroes were stirred to think seriously of their place in the world and of their relations with Africa. No less important was the fact that hundreds of students from Africa...found fertile ideas in the clash of debate. (Anene, et al 1966:531).

These students, many of whom were later to become leaders in their own countries must have picked up the seeds of Pan-Africanism in the New World, planting them with their academic degrees. Among these were Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe who became known as the doyen of West Africa's Pan-Africanists and later, Dr Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. The ideas of Pan-Africanism having evolved slowly over the first half of the twentieth century were later expressed as a programme of principles at a conference Manchester, UK in 1945. Here for the first time in the history of Pan-Africanism the leading participants were no longer Negroes of the New World but Africans from the homeland. (Anene, et al 1966:532-3).

Nkrumah became a leading Pan-Africanist on the continent especially after Ghana gained independence in 1957 ahead of several other countries on the continent. In 1958 he hosted the first conference of the Independent African Countries, which were eight in number: Ghana, Egypt, the Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Liberia, and Ethiopia. The second conference of Independent African States was held in Addis Ababa in 1960 where the number of members had risen to fifteen. In 1963, when the Organisation of African Unity was formed in Addis Ababa, the number had risen to twenty-eight member states. Pan-Africanism has its roots in what people of African stock felt about themselves and their conditions. These feelings were expressed in songs and poems and hymns and spirituals; they tell of the attitudes of black people and their aspirations. Gradually, these emotional feelings, attitudes and aspirations formed themselves into ideas for social and political action. It emerged as a movement of intellectual protest. (Anene, et al 1966:534).

Pan-Africanism is thus a noble cause as perceived by African leaders, both past and present. It is a desirable goal as envisioned by Africans both in the diaspora and at home. It also demands a loyalty to Africa which over-rides purely national loyalties. Africa is supposed to be seen as greater than any of its states, just as each state is greater than any of its separate ethnic societies. African leaders were therefore supposed to also see the creation of their nation-states as only a step towards creating a wider community of states based on the idea of a single African nationhood. In line with this expectation, Tanzania's former president Julius Nyerere believed that:

The role of African nationalism is different or should be different from the nationalism of the past; that the African national state is an instrument for the unification of Africa and not for dividing Africa; that African nationalism is meaningless, is dangerous, is anachronistic, if it is not the same thing as Pan-Africanism. (Anene, et al 1966:538)

Pan-Africanism is thus a desired goal for African unity. It is also perceived as a necessity. Many view it as an inevitability. As early as the turn of the 20th century Garvey, had predicted thus;

"No one knows when the hour of Africa's redemption cometh. It is in the wind, it is coming. One day like a storm it will be here. When that day comes all Africa will stand together." (Ajayi, et al 1974:589).

For years therefore, African politicians from all parts of the
continent have called for African unity. From Nkrumah to Nyerere to Kaunda etc. However, Pan-Africanism as already noted above was pioneered outside of African shores by Henry Sylvester Williams a West Indian from Trinidad. By the turn of the twentieth century, he was instrumental to the holding of that conference in London which purposed to challenge colonialists to reform and stop the abuses of Africans. Thus the expression 'Pan- Africanism' did not come into use until the beginning of the twentieth century when Henry Sylvester Williams and Edward Burghardt Dubois of the United States of America both of African descent used it at several pan-African congresses which were mainly attended by scholars of African descent from the New World (Mutiso, et al 2007:341).

These congresses culminated in the one held in Manchester in 1945 where Pan-African nationalism finally took a concrete shape. For the first time, a necessity for a well-organised, firmly-knit movement as a primary condition for the success of national liberation struggle in Africa was stressed (Ibid:341). National Independence for nation-states was to lead to African unity, so that the nation-stateship was never to be an end in itself, but a means to securing African unity. The Pan-African movement thus became an expression of African nationalism.

It is however disheartening to note that although the first summit of OAU (now AU), took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1963, not much progress has been made towards African Unity. According to Cameron Duodu:

_Forty- seven years after many African countries gained their independence, Pan-Africanism is still only words on paper._ (New African, July 2007: 18).

Duodu stressed that African unity is for diplomats and not for the rest of ordinary Africans. This is to say, Africans live in a different world to that of their governments. African leaders live in a world of diplomacy and summits which is out of touch with the ordinary world of the ordinary African. And since African Governments do not talk to the African people, they never get feedback; it would not matter to them because “diplomacy has its own requirements”. (New African, July 2007:19).

_Since African governments preach “unity” without doing anything concrete about it, Duodu is of the opinion that African people must pressurise African governments to put their words into action_ (New African, 2007:20).

The AU's Assembly of Heads of State and Government, simply known as the Assembly is recognisably the supreme policymaking organ of the union. The purpose of its annual sessions is to review and formulate policies for the body on all matters of concern to Africa or a majority of African States. Several of the resolutions adopted by the AU however do not get implemented by its member-states so that a re-adoption of resolutions keeps recurring. But the cry of many an ordinary African should be like Duodu's; give us African unity now!

**Why Unity Now!**

Inspite of a superficial movement towards a global village; and a globalising ethos that is manifest in high-tech communication, jet-speed travel and an apparent elimination of national and regional boundaries; regions of the world are still bonding together in economic and political spheres, as well as securing communities for their development and progress. Therefore, why not African unity now?

African leaders both past and present have seen the need for a united Africa and have expressed themselves variously on this issue. J.N Nyerere writing in 1969, said:

_For years African politicians from all parts of the continent have called for African Unity. They have presented the political and economic arguments for it and left the details alone._ (Mutiso et al 2007:327)

Nyerere went on to suggest that hard thought and detailed negotiation need to replace slogans if the objective was to be
attained. Nyerere saw unity as essential for the safety, integrity and the development of Africa....Unity must prevent the political exploitation of our fears and needs by those outside Africa; it must not be possible for the different parts of Africa to compete one against the other for economic favours in return for political concessions. (Mutiso, et al 2007:328) He talked about the need for an All-African government—a type of United Nations of Africa. According to him, Africa wishes to have the political strength to prevent other powers from using her for their own ends, and it wishes to have the economic strength to justify and support a modern economy—which is the only basis on which prosperity can come to a people. (Ibid: 327). Nkruma was of the same opinion as when he wrote in 1963. According to him,

*We need a common political basis for the integration of our policies in economic planning, defence, foreign and diplomatic relations. That basis for a political action need not infringe on the essential sovereignty of the separate African States.* (Mutiso, et al 2007:334) Kaunda supported Pan-Africanism in the following words;

“No amount of aid from outside the continent can obscure the responsibility which Pan-Africa has towards its own critically affected members.” (Mutiso, et al 2007:347) Again, Pan-Africanism is fertile well of ideas, plans and policies which it is possible to consider on their merits. (Ibid: 349)

He was also of the opinion that It is the rising generation whom we must imbibe with the spirit of African Unity. The young people of Africa are likely to have a more sophisticated outlook upon international affairs than their leaders. (Ibid: 349) Agreeing with Nyerere and Duodu, he affirmed that the idea of African Unity must move out of the realm where it is merely a talking shop, a specialist study, an intellectualist preoccupation and the concern of a few pressure groups to the realm of action. More recently, talk of a United States of Africa has again taken the centrestage. According to I.F. Cush;

*Culture and Communication as Pre-requisites for Pan-Africanism in Africa plans to reach a United States of Africa by 2017*, while in the words of the Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade.

“At the level of the African Union, we are planning to reach the United States of Africa by 2017”, and in preparation for it the AU will begin to install the architecture for a continental form of government beginning in 2010”. (New African, November 2009:48) How can Africa move from rhetorics on African Unity to action and implementation. This writer is of the opinion that culture and communication could be utilised in a globalising world to advance the cause of African Unity (Pan-Africanism)

**Culture – A Unifying Force**

Described as the learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting. (M. Harris, 1983:5) Culture could truly be made a unifying force. It spells out the identity of social groups. Because it is shared and owned collectively, it also promotes a sense of belonging among the members of the society that subscribe to it. It is the difference in cultures that speaks for social group identities. But the question is; can we talk of a homogenous African culture? Someone has identified African skin tone as a unifying feature. But beyond our skin what traditions, lifestyles, what 'patterned repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting' identify us as Africans?

The answers to these questions may be suggested by a poem by a Nigerian poet, Gabriel Okara entitled "Piano and Drums" (Nwoga:1967). An obvious interpretation of this poem, places the 'piano' as a symbol of European culture while 'drums' stand for African culture. The African drum is linked to African performance forms like; dance, music and theatre and can therefore become a unifying factor for Pan-Africanism. Indeed culture was recognised early as a unifying force in the discussion of the Pan-Africanist project.

One of the commissions established in its formative years by means of which it sought to bring African countries together was
the Educational, Scientific, Cultural and Health Commission. This commission among other things recommended the publication of an African journal of African Culture and artistic activities to provide a medium for African writers and artists to make their activities part of OAU activities generally, and the organisation of cultural festivals likely to promote African Unity by bringing together African artists, playwrights, novelists, dancers, musicians, painters and historians.

Thus the All-African Cultural Festival was hosted by the Algerian Government in July–August 1969. Thirty African states, six Liberation Movements and several world renowned artists of African descent from all parts of the world participated in the festival. It was organised in three parts. The first part was an exhibition and performance of drama, dances, instrumental ensembles, folklore, traditional and modern orchestra, ballet, songs, films, paintings, sculpture, architecture and literature. The second part was a series of symposia in which African scholars discussed various aspects of African culture and how it could contribute towards rapid economic, political and social development of Africa and its member states. The third part was a meeting of the first African cultural council that had been created by the council of ministers for the purpose of organising cultural festivals every three years. The discussions of the council centred on the role of African culture in the struggle for national liberation, in the economic and social development of Africa and in strengthening African unity.

Sadly, although the festival was considered a great success, attempts to hold subsequent festivals proved difficult, because, according to the Secretary-General, it had not been possible to find another country prepared to stage the second festival. It was until 1977 that Nigeria rose to the occasion to host what is popularly known as FESTAC 77; not the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture.

The point being underscored here by this historical referencing is the importance of culture in realising the goals of Pan-Africanism which indeed was recognised early in the history of OAU/AU.

Unfortunately, cultural festivals being expensive ventures, have been abandoned in the pursuit of African unity. There is therefore a need to seek alternative means by which culture could remain in the centre stage in the realisation of Pan-African goals.

African performance forms symbolised by the 'drum' are grassroots-based. A promotion of Pan-Africanist goals at the grassroots levels through folk performances could prove more advantageous and realistic both financially and otherwise. Folk-media could thus play an important role in awareness creation at the grassroots. Thus both culture and communication are essential pre-requisites for achieving Pan-Africanist goals. We have mentioned the use of folk-media which exist at the grass-roots and are closely tied to the ethnic cultures of (African) people. They are also the equivalent of mass media which are found at the urban/global levels. A combination of both folk and mass media could prove an important factor in promoting/realising Pan-Africanist goals and objectives.

There is a folk-medium, a communication outfit that engages at the grassroots level known as Theatre for Development (TDF). It has been practiced in South Africa (Mda,1993), East Africa (Odhiambo,2008) and West Africa (Abah,1977). It uses the cultural forms of local communities to disseminate ideas and information through dialogue and performance. Inspiring discussions become the platforms for engaging communities in the exchange of views and information. Drama performances based on views and information gathered in the exchanges go a long way in confirming dialogue and learning. This theatre practice does not require any specialist training and skills but can be engaged in by anybody. It is therefore accessible to local communities when put at their disposal. It only requires an outside facilitating group to guide and direct activities. Theatre for Development could therefore be an effective tool to conscientise and create awareness at the grassroots about the Pan-African project.

The mass media can also be effectively used to promote Pan-Africanism. As mentioned earlier, globalisation which implies a