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## Continental pan-Africanism: the first all-African people's conference and the struggle for Africa's independence

### Le panafricanisme continental : La première Conférence panafricaine des peuples (First All-African People's Conference) et la lutte pour l'indépendance de l'Afrique

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The first All-African People's Conference (AAPC), convened in Accra in December 1958, marked a pivotal moment in the quest for African autonomy and solidarity. Led by Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore, the conference aimed to empower Africa by advocating for independence from colonial rule and asserting a distinct African voice globally. Drawing from primary and secondary sources, this article investigates the AAPC as a seminal event in the emergence of continental Pan-Africanism. It shows how the AAPC inspired hope for African agency, while also ushering in ideological and political schisms that have contributed to its ambiguous legacy. The article further contends that understanding the fluidity of Pan-Africanism requires methodological attention to its practical and political expressions. It advocates for a contextual and interpretative approach that focuses on situated meaning within historical contexts rather than adhering to a teleological definition. It argues that studying solidarity events like the AAPC provides valuable insights into the multifaceted evolution of Pan-Africanism.

**Keywords:** Africa; All-African People's Conference (AAPC); George Padmore; Ghana; Kwame Nkrumah; Pan-Africanism

La première Conférence panafricaine des peuples (All-African People's Conference – AAPC), qui s'est tenue à Accra en décembre 1958, a marqué un tournant dans la quête de l'autonomie et de la solidarité africaines. Dirigée par Kwame Nkrumah et George Padmore, la conférence visait à renforcer l'autonomie de l'Afrique en plaidant pour l'indépendance vis-à-vis de la domination coloniale et en affirmant une voix africaine distincte au niveau mondial. S'appuyant sur des sources primaires et secondaires, cet article étudie le AAPC en tant qu'événement fondateur de l'émergence du panafricanisme continental. Il montre comment le AAPC a suscité l'espoir d'une action africaine, tout en provoquant des schismes idéologiques et politiques qui ont contribué à l'ambiguïté de son héritage. L'article soutient en outre que la compréhension de la fluidité du panafricanisme exige une attention méthodologique à ses expressions pratiques et politiques. Il plaide en faveur d'une approche contextuelle et interprétative qui se concentre sur la signification située dans les contextes historiques plutôt que d'adhérer à une définition téléologique. Il soutient que l'étude d'événements de solidarité tels que l'AAPC fournit des informations précieuses sur l'évolution multiforme du panafricanisme.

**Mots-clés:** Afrique; Conférence panafricaine des peuples (AAPC); George Padmore; Ghana; Kwame Nkrumah; panafricanisme

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## Introduction

The first All-African People's Conference (AAPC) was a history-making event aimed at forging African agency in the international system. Held in Accra from 8 to 12 December 1958, it gathered anti-colonial and civil rights activists, trade unionists, Cold War diplomats, students, refugees, and spies. Notable attendees included Tom Mboya from Kenya, who served as the chairman of the conference; Patrice Lumumba from the Belgian Congo; Frantz Fanon representing FNLA of Algeria; Hastings Banda from Nyasaland (Malawi); Kenneth Kaunda from Northern Rhodesia (Zambia); Joshua Nkomo from Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe); Ntsu Mokhehle from Basutoland (Lesotho); Holden Roberto from Angola; Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alfred Hutchinson, and Mary-Louise Hooper representing South Africa; Alioune Diop from the *Journal Présence africaine*, and Michael Scott representing Southwest Africa (Namibia).

Nkrumah was doggedly determined to leverage Ghana's hard-won autonomy to challenge colonialism on a continental scale. Shortly after independence, he organised the first Conference of Independent African States (CIAS) from 15 to 22 April 1958. This was the first such conference held on the continent itself at the inter-state level, bringing together representatives from Ghana, Liberia, Ethiopia, Libya, Tunisia, Sudan, Morocco, and the United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria). In a resolute commitment to independence, as characterised by The New Statesman editorial (1958) as the 'Monroe Doctrine of Africa,' the CIAS demanded the complete independence and liberation of the continent. The AAPC emerged in part as a response to complaints from independence movements about their exclusion from the CIAS. However, it also had a long gestation, as Nkrumah and Padmore aimed to continue the earlier diaspora Pan-African Congresses on the continent. It drew inspiration from the first Pan-African Conference in 1900 organised by Henry Silvester Williams, as well as the subsequent four Congresses organised by Du Bois between 1919 and 1927, and more directly from the fifth Congress organised by George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah in 1945 in Manchester (Grilli 2018a). Initially named the Sixth Pan-African Congress, the event was later retitled the All-African People's Conference, likely reflecting Nkrumah's intent to highlight its significance as the first of its kind on the continent (Grant 1973, 279).

The AAPC, organised by Nkrumah, his advisor George Padmore, and Ras Makonnen, key figures in the Fifth Pan-African Congress of 1945, represented a pivotal moment in the evolution of the Pan-African movement. Its relocation to the continent underscored continuity and profound reorientation, shifting its focus from mere resistance against colonial dominance to a multifaceted agenda centred on African empowerment. This article delves deeply into the AAPC to explore the development of Pan-Africanism on the continent as a praxis that connects the ideals of self-determination with political action. It does this by providing an empirical and analytical discussion of the unfolding of the conference, moving through the stages of inspiration, preparation, and implementation. However, it does not aim to present a fully comprehensive account of the conference. Instead, it attempts to piece together fragments from available primary and secondary sources to construct a useful picture of the AAPC. The article also approaches the study of the AAPC as a methodological exercise to refine our understanding of Pan-Africanism. It argues against viewing Pan-Africanism solely through generalised historical narratives, overarching theories, or simplified functionalistic concepts. Instead, it advocates for a nuanced interpretive approach that examines the political praxis through which Pan-Africanism is actualised and continuously reshaped, including through activities like solidarity events. By doing so, the article suggests that events such as the AAPC offer insights into the evolving meaning of Pan-Africanism, revealing contextualised and variegated processes that have influenced its manifestation on the continent.

The article makes three main points. Firstly, it argues that, while stemming directly from and carried forward the anti-colonial legacy of the Manchester Congress, the AAPC also represented a distinct departure. It sought not only independence from colonial rule but also aimed to establish Pan-Africanism as a framework for guiding Africa's conduct in the international arena. In their efforts, Nkrumah and Padmore sought to redefine Pan-Africanism by imbuing it with new meanings, tempering its connection to the broader international communist movement, especially the Soviet Union and Afro-Asian Solidarity, and charting a distinct course from that of the West. In a sense, this marks the inception of continental Pan-African praxis.

Secondly, the article illustrates how this continental Pan-African ethos, centred on collective African political agency, found profound expression in the very political and organisational preparations for the AAPC. This commitment was evident from its intellectual inception, setting the agenda through to resource mobilisation and managing the proceedings. The steering committee intentionally mobilised resources exclusively from Africa, particularly from Ghana, and rejected foreign assistance (McCray 1959; Springer 1958). These deliberate actions were aimed at establishing an autonomous movement with the goal of organisationally empowering Africa and promoting Pan-Africanism as a lived reality. In essence, the conference aimed to challenge what Jean-François Bayart (1993) referred to as the historically 'extraverted' nature of Africa's international relations, where sovereignty on the continent historically relied on external dependencies.

Thirdly, the article argues that this pan-African vision of continental self-reliance was not fully realised on a broader scale. In fact, the AAPC decisively exposed ideological and political schisms among both participating and non-participating African nationalist organisations. It shows that initiation and proceedings of the conference were far from smooth, as underlying tensions exacerbated by the Cold War, combined with the pan-Africanist socialist agenda of the conference, created exacerbated existing inter-state tensions. The AAPC illuminated, the article will demonstrate, the challenges and fragility inherent in attempts to establish a radical pan-African framework for continental solidarity politics.

This article relies primarily on two main bodies of primary sources. Firstly, it draws on first-hand accounts written by anti-colonial leaders and academics in reports, memoirs, and books, such as those by Kwame Nkrumah, Joshua Nkomo, Ras Makonnen, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Eslanda Robeson, Stan Grant, George McCray and Maida Springer. It also draws on accounts of observers and fraternal delegates, predominantly reported on the sidelines, including George M. Houser, Mercer Cook, Edwin S. Munger, and the Russian delegate I. Potekhin. Secondly, it utilises significant coverage of the conference from the local press, particularly the Ghanaian Evening News, as well as from the international press. These materials, while not impartial, offer diverse and contextualised interpretations of the event, providing valuable insight into the development of continental pan-Africanism at the time of the AAPC, rather than solely through post-event accounts. Some of these sources are relatively well-known and analysed by many scholars (Ahlman 2010; Gaines 2006; Gerits 2023; Grilli 2018a; Thompson 1969; Williams 2021). However, most of these studies have primarily focused on diplomatic relations, great power and Cold War politics, and Ghanaian foreign policy. They largely overlook the praxis of continental Pan-Africanism and provide limited detailed accounts of the AAPC as a transformative event. Matteo Grilli's seminal work, while emphasising the vital importance of the AAPC in African nationalist movements, fails to delve deeper into continental Pan-Africanism, instead only asserting that 'the only significant difference was that with the AAPC, the Pan-African movement had finally established its headquarters in Africa' (2018a, 103). This article aims to address this gap by specifically highlighting the AAPC as a valuable resource for studying continental Pan-Africanism. In so doing, the article provides a methodological approach and an empirically based contribution to debates in the study of pan-Africanism.

The article first describes the preparatory phase of the conference, examining how organisers attempted to set the intellectual agenda, define the contours of pan-Africanism vis-à-vis Afro-Asian solidarity, and assert organisational independence, including the range of actors (delegates) represented and the nature of their attendance. It then presents an analysis of the salient aspects of the proceedings of the conference and reflects on its contradictory legacy. It concludes by suggesting that AAPC an example through which we can locate the shifting meaning of pan-Africanism.

### **Defining the contours of a pan-African conference**

A considerable amount of attention went into planning the conference. George Padmore was particularly instrumental in setting up contours of the agenda for the conference. Born in Trinidad in 1903 as Malcolm Nurse, Padmore moved to the U.S. in 1924 to study medicine at Fisk University. He later transferred to New York University and then to Howard University. While in the U.S., he joined the Communist Party USA and adopted the name George Padmore. His involvement with the Communist International led him to Moscow, where he became head of its African Division. Padmore later moved to Germany but became disillusioned with the Soviet Union due to its lack of support for colonised peoples (James 2015). He left the organisation for London where he became one of the driving forces behind the fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester (James 2015) and a major influence on Nkrumah's political development. Padmore relocated to Accra in 1957 to serve as a special advisor to the prime minister on African Affairs (James 2015). In 1956, Padmore published 'Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa,' in which he discussed Pan-Africanism as an ideational foundation for the socialist union of African states and a vision for non-aligned international relations. While holding onto their central commitment to socialism, Padmore developed the idea of Pan-Africanism as a political praxis that transcended older identifications with race and affiliation with great powers (Padmore 1956).

Padmore brought to Accra his experience from the Comintern, London campaigns, and extensive networks, spanning the British left, American and Caribbean affiliations, and African labour leaders. Padmore took the leadership role in pulling people together, but also shaped the intellectual agenda for the conference. He initiated newspaper coverage of the conference almost immediately after the CIAS. Foreshadowing the AAPC debate on violence, Lord Fenner Brockway, the British chairman of the pacifist Movement for Colonial Freedom and a close associate of Padmore, and Frantz Fanon (writing under the pseudonym 'Visitor'), presented differing views on violence and the Algerian issue. On April 1st, Brockway criticised the brutal nature of French colonialism in Algeria. Fanon, writing as the 'Visitor' just two weeks later, argued that it was the responsibility of African peoples, especially the Algerian people, to actively seek their freedom 'through all available means' (cited in Duodu 2011).

Leading up to the AAPC, the Evening News featured contributions from influential figures in academia, activism, and politics for its special column titled 'Towards the Historic December Conference'. Among the prominent contributors, Basil Davidson (1958a) published an interview-based profile of Gabriel d'Arboussier, Chairman of the Grand Council of the French West Africa, emphasising the imminent possibility of a French English-speaking federation of West African states. In another article, on December 3, Davidson (1958b) observed a significant trend towards solidarity on the continent at the time, indicating the 'great chance for a united state of Africa'. Sekou Touré (1958), sharing similar optimism, situated the political initiative of West Africa in the historical *longue durée*. Nkrumah (1958a) himself wrote a piece asserting, 'Nobody can turn back the clock in Africa.'

In addition to shaping the agenda through the press, Padmore laid out the vision for the conference through a call that echoed the powerful sentiments of *The Communist Manifesto* (AAPC 1958):

This conference will formulate and Proclaim the Philosophy of Pan-Africanism as the ideology of the African non-violent revolution. Henceforth our slogan shall be Peoples of Africa Unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a Continent to regain!! You have Freedom and Human Dignity to attain!! HANDS OFF AFRICA!! AFRICA MUST BE FREE!!!!

Distributed well in advance during the summer to all trade unions, political parties and nationalist organisations, the call and provisional agenda of the conference elicited varied responses across the continent. While anti-colonial freedom fighters embraced it, French African leaders, apprehensive about potential repercussions with France, remained aloof. The True Whig Party of Liberia strongly protested the content of the provisional agenda. They issued a 10-page rebuttal addressing each of the five proposed agendas: colonialism and imperialism, racism and discriminatory laws and practices, tribalism and religious separatism, the question of chieftaincy in Africa and regional integration. They argued that the matters on the agenda primarily pertained to the internal affairs of the countries and cautioned the Conference to abstain from making definitive decisions (True Whig Party 1958). They argued the of ‘the philosophy of Pan-African Socialism ... proposed as an ideology for the Africa Non-Violent Revolution may not be adaptable to the African way of life’ (True Whig Party 1958).

The diametrically opposing views of the True Whig Party to the conference were nowhere more clearly expressed than in their perspectives on the nature of colonial occupation in Africa. The Party directly challenged Nkrumah’s thesis on (neo)colonialism, disputing the notion of its enduring nature. They argued that economic and military imperialism were receding and stressed the importance for Africa to remain vigilant against cultural imperialism, which they deemed as the remaining concern (True Whig Party 1958, 4). In contrast to Nkrumah’s self-assertive politics, the True Whig Party adopted a more tepid approach, seeking to press existing power relations within the post-World War II sovereign state order to accede to Africa’s demands.

Although the conference call became a critical document for Liberia to articulate its differences from Nkrumah’s pan-African path, this was not the first instance of Liberia expressing concern. Cynicism about Ghana’s activities had been brewing for a while. At the CIAS, Liberia was concerned that the conference was an effort by newly independent Ghana to assert leadership in African affairs. In the preparatory meeting of Ambassadors of Independent African States in London, Liberia pressed for the inclusion of ‘subversive ideologies’ and ‘conspiracies aimed at African states’ as agenda items for discussion in the conference (Thompson 1969). However, this proposal did not garner unanimous support. Yet, at the commencement of the CIAS conference in Accra, Liberia successfully reintroduced the agenda, leading to the passage of a resolution affirming the principle of the right of each nation to defend ‘itself singly or collectively’ and refrain from all forms of external interference aimed at undermining the ‘independence, sovereignty, or territorial integrity’ of the independent African states (CIAS 1958). Such manoeuvring was hardly possible at the AAPC. The powerful anti-colonial and anti-imperial thrust surrounding the conference at that time left Liberia isolated. It is noteworthy that while Tubman of Liberia showed certain receptiveness to Nkrumah’s pan-African solidarity (Biney 2011), Nkrumah was striving to advance radical continental Pan-Africanism during a turbulent era of decolonisation, amidst complex domestic politics and inter-state relationships. The atmosphere of mutual insecurity between the two countries prompted each side to adopt containment strategies against the other. The legacy of this era, which fuelled growing disillusionment with Pan-Africanism starting at CIAS

and intensifying after the 1960s, provided little fertile ground for Nkrumah's continental Pan-Africanism to establish deep roots.

### **Ideological struggles**

Although inter-African intramural relations were important, the essence of continental Pan-Africanism, as reflected in the agenda and objectives of the AAPC, lay in how new African states could collectively carve out an identity and define a distinct course for active independent participation in international politics. In contrast to the anti-imperialism of the 1955 Asian-African Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, that side-lined Africa, the AAPC represented a distinct historical path conceived as a tool to disrupt all forms of epistemological legacies of colonialism. The Asian-African conference, needless to say, was not the birthplace of the non-aligned movement, nor was it truly inclusive. Robert Vitalis exposed Africa's marginalisation and dispelled myths of African participation, highlighting how many commentators falsely believed that Nkrumah himself attended Bandung. The inclusive rhetoric of the conference obscured the hierarchical reality inherent in non-western solidarity movements. In a noteworthy moment at the Conference, Jawaharlal Nehru echoed imperialist views reminiscent of the 'white man's burden' that had once justified European colonialism. He declared, 'There is nothing more terrible and horrible than the tragedy of Africa in the last several hundred years.' Nehru further proclaimed, 'It is up to Asia to help Africa to the best of her ability' (cited in Jack 1955, 12).

Asian paternalism brought about a stark realisation for Nkrumah that anti-African sentiments did not solely emanate from Europe and the United States but also from an anti-imperial bloc. At the CIAS, using a metaphorical 'rivers of the world' analogy, Nkrumah warned Africa needed to avoid a situation where European influence would be replaced by Asian paternalism (Gerits 2016). He recounted a story where the Thames, Ganges, Hudson, and Mississippi rivers mockingly questioned Africa's worthiness and suggested that the Nile should stay at home (Legum 1958). Nkrumah particularly paid specific attention to Nasser's special interest in promoting national liberation movements in Africa. Nkrumah paid specific attention to Nasser's special interest in promoting national liberation movements in Africa. After failing to form a pan-Arab defensive pact, Nasser focused on African liberation movements to remove British and Israeli influences from the Nile Valley. He provided diplomatic support, financial aid, and training to African nationalists (Houser 1958). However, albeit successful to some extent, Egypt's self-appointed 'big brother' role, resembling colonial attitudes, (Zartman 1972) also rendered this approach counterproductive. Nasser indeed long harboured a 'patronizing view' (Vitalis 2013, 275) towards Africa. In his book 'The Philosophy of the Revolution,' he emphasised Egypt's duty to 'the spread of enlightenment and civilisation to the remotest depths of the jungle.' His vision for Africa centred on establishing in Cairo 'a great African institute dedicated to unveiling the dark reaches of the continent, to creating ... an enlightened African consciousness' (Nasser 1955, 109–110). These ideas seemed to have shaped Nasser's approach to Africa, leading him into an ideological and political collision course with Nkrumah's pan-African vision. In March 1957, when Nkrumah publicly announced Accra's hosting of the Pan-African Nationalist Congress, Egypt within weeks, eager to vie for African leadership, pre-empted Nkrumah by initiating plans for the first Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference (Legum 1958). The rivalry intensified with Cairo Radio's propaganda against Nkrumah's cooperation with Israel (Akinsanya 1976). Nasser established the Afro-Asian Solidarity Secretariat in Cairo as a platform for asserting leadership in the anti-colonial movement on the continent (Akinsanya 1976; Rivkin 1959). While Afro-Asian Solidarity, on the surface, shares common anti-imperial, anti-capitalist, and socialist foundations with pan-Africanism, appealing to desperate anti-colonial nationalists, in the eyes of Nkrumah, they represent two competing visions (Brown 1958;

Houser 1958). One envisions Africa for itself, while the other sees Africa as a subordinate partner to the Arab world. Nkrumah's positive neutralism was rooted in pan-African self-determination, whereas, for Nasser, it involved power-balancing acts amid navigating the various influences of great powers in the context of Cold War politics (Akinsanya 1976). For Nkrumah, it was also essential for African states to develop foreign policy independent of Egyptian pressures. Nasser's anti-imperialist conference simply did not align with pan-African goals.

The fact that Cold War politics was enacted or mediated through African actors made Nasser even more problematic for Nkrumah's pan-African project. Nkrumah was particularly concerned that Nasser's dependence on the Soviets for arms and support for the Aswan Dam project might pave the way for communist influence in Africa (Legum 1958). The AAPC was in part intended to challenge the leadership assumptions of Nasser and resist the co-option of African liberation movements into the circuit of a Soviet-led anti-Western movement (Brown 1958; Houser 1958). Nkrumah intentionally scheduled the AAPC to coincide with the Afro-Asian Economic Conference in Cairo. The dates of the Cairo conference were set for 8 December long before the Accra meeting (Munger 1962). While this choice can be seen as, to some extent, a reciprocal response to Nasser's earlier takeover of Nkrumah's plan for a pan-African conference, the main goal was to steer African nationalists towards a pan-African direction. Nkrumah's actions aggrieved Cairo, turning its conference into an APPC counter-event. Nasser dramatically proclaimed 'Quit Africa Day' as a challenge to 'Africa Freedom Day' – declared on April 15 by the resolutions of the conference of independent African states in Accra in April 1958. 'Quit Africa Day' was designed to foster unity between Arabs and blacks against their perceived common adversary – the Western 'imperialists,' whom Nasser characterised as 'murderers' and 'bloodsuckers' (Time magazine 1958). However, Nasser's efforts had limited impact in diverting attention away from the AAPC among mainstream anti-colonial movements.

In the meantime, during the conference preparation period, the steering committee maintained a vigilant stance, carefully navigating even the slightest and seemingly benign manifestations of superpower influence, both logistically and ideologically. They adopted a policy against accepting foreign funds (McCray 1959; Springer 1958). According to Saint Drake (1959), Ghana's ambassador to Moscow declined Khrushchev's offer to support the conference with a simultaneous translation system and a proposed football match between Ghana and Soviet teams. Both offers were declined, and instead, the idea of a football match between Russia and Ghana was substituted with a Guinea-Ghana game. The proposal for translation support would have been highly beneficial, particularly considering the chaotic translation issues experienced, especially with French, during the conference (Cook 1959).

### **Accra bound: diplomacy and disputes**

The conference drew participants from diverse paths across the continent. While some arrived in Accra through unexpected encounters, others embarked on challenging journeys. Lumumba's participation was notably serendipitous. According to Nzongola-Ntalaja (2014), A.R. Mohamed Babu, Zanzibarian Marxist, and Tom Mboya were en route to Accra from Nairobi and, during a layover in Kinshasa, sought to connect with Congolese political leaders. They approached a Kiswahili-speaking hotel worker who guided them to Lumumba in a bar where he was promoting Polar beer. Impressed, they promptly sent a telegraph to the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East and Central Africa (PAFMECA) in Dar es Salaam, requesting funds to enable a Congolese delegation to attend the Accra conference. Alfred Hutchinson, one of the accused in the South African Treason Trials, unexpectedly arrived on the second day of the conference as a representative of the ANC, sparking jubilation among the attendees. In his book 'Road to Ghana' (1960), Hutchison vividly recounts his journey, detailing his escape



from apartheid South Africa to Tanganyika and ultimately by air arrived in Ghana. Yet not all participants were official delegates. The news of the conference percolated through the word of mouth had already generated widespread excitement across the continent. Ras Makonnen (1973) highlighted the varied and often challenging journeys taken by participants, such as those who travelled from Malawi via the Congo route and other distant locations.

We would be rung up by the police at the frontier and told that some fellows had arrived; they would have no passports, and they would say simply: 'We've got no documents, because this is our country; this is our land. What's all this about needing a passport?' It was overwhelming, and it meant that we needed enlightened policemen on the frontiers who would know not to enforce the regulations too strictly. The message of independence had gone out; the call had gone to near and far, and the various groups had just set out to come to 'Rome'.

As guests arrived, they were housed at the African Affairs Centre, consisting of approximately twenty-five chalets near the airport. These chalets, originally designated for secretaries before independence, were later acquired and refurbished by Ras Makonnen. However, by mid-November, the lodging capacity had maxed out with 400 delegates. In response, the organising committee issued an appeal through the Evening News on November 17th, calling on citizens to provide additional accommodations. The headline, 'WANTED: MORE ROOMS,' galvanised public support for the African cause. Presented in uppercase as 'THE REVOLUTIONARY CALL OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE,' the appeal conveyed the message that 'A FEW ROOMS AND IMPERIALISM IS DEAD FOREVER' (Evening News 1958a). The announcement appealed to citizens' patriotic duty, citing examples like artist Kofi Antubam and Ghanaian independence activist Hannah Cudjoe, who volunteered to host guests.

The conference attracted international observers and fraternal delegates from Canada, China, India, Indonesia, the Soviet Union, the UK, and the US. Notable among them were nearly forty Americans, including civil rights activist Congressman Charles Diggs Jr. of Detroit and Claude Barnett, founder of the Associated Negro Press. A notable absence was W.E.B. Du Bois, whom Nkrumah had sought to open the conference. However, due to his advanced age of ninety-one, Du Bois had been advised against travelling from the US. In his place, Mrs. Du Bois read his speech on Thursday morning. Chicagoan trade unionists George McCray, Irving Brown, and Maida Springer, trusted allies of Padmore from the diaspora, played crucial roles in organising the conference (Gaines 2006; McCray 1959). Padmore went so far as to relax restrictions on receiving foreign funds, allowing them to raise money from U.S. labour movements to finance the travels of East African labour delegates. However, various U.S. organisations pursued their own agendas that did not necessarily align with the conference's pan-African objectives. Almost a decade later, in February 1967, The New York Times exposed the African American Institute, and the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC) as CIA fronts. Delegates from AMSAC, including Horace Mann Bond, Will Mercer Cook, and John Aubrey Davis, implicated as CIA agents, wrote reports about the conference (Williams 2021).

For Padmore, African Americans were evidently integral to the Pan-African movement. His primary concern, however, seemed to be preventing potential Soviet influence, particularly through alliances with the Afro-Asian Solidarity Council and Egypt. Dissatisfied with Nkrumah's political manoeuvres, Egypt already had written to the organisers, proposing to send over a contingent of 100 delegates to the conference. However, suspecting Egypt was attempting to exert control over a conference by flooding it with delegates, Padmore rejected the Egyptian request and set a limit of 5 delegates (Munger 1962). Despite Egypt's insistence on sending 30 delegates, Padmore stood firm, and ultimately, they settled for sending 5 delegates. Ultimately, Egypt sent 11 official delegates led by Fouad Galal, Vice-President of the Egyptian National

Assembly (Evening News 1958b). Yet, Egypt also managed to discreetly bring in more Africans, largely students residing in Cairo, into Accra, claiming that they represented their respective countries and sought accreditation for them from the organisers (Hoskyns 1959). However, the steering committee blocked the accreditation of unofficial delegates by scrupulously checking their credentials. The situation became sombre for the organisers when, on December 4, the leader of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Council's delegation, upon arrival in Accra, stated to the Evening News that the conference was an 'extension to Bandung' (Evening News 1958b). The perceived link between AAPC and Bandung, along with similar international media allegations, undermined the pan-African agenda of the conference. In response, on December 11, Mboya held a press conference to explicitly distance the All-African Conference from the Afro-Asian Solidarity Council (Evening News 1958c). He emphasised, 'I have to point it out categorically that this conference is NOT in any way directly or indirectly connected with the Afro-Asian Solidarity Group.' The Russians, led by Pigam A. Azimov, on their part, believed that the conference was penetrated by the Americans (Potekhin 1959). In an effort to defuse potential sources of controversy, in a last-minute decision, the steering committee decided to exclude fraternal delegates from committee meetings.

### **'Scram from Africa'**

The conference opened on Monday, 8 December at Accra's Community Centre. Situated overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, the white-painted Centre was adorned with flags and banners, featuring messages such as 'Forward to Independence, Now' across the roof and 'Hands Off Africa! Africa Must Be Free' inside (Hoskyns 1959). The atmosphere was generally festive and celebratory. However, the steering committee, wary of potential acrimony, exercised a vigilant and watchful approach, closely monitoring the activities of delegates. This scrutiny extended to the extent that the committee appeared to have read draft speeches of some of the delegates. In one instance, newspaper accounts, Prince Zakarin of Mauritania, a delegate representing a small left-wing party, had a speech draft that purportedly included sharp criticism of Ghana's decision to maintain its membership in the Commonwealth. It also accused British West Africa states of being mere puppets of the imperialists and characterised Kwame Nkrumah as 'a lackey of London.' Despite his protests, the prince was deported by Ghanaian police (Manchester Evening News 1958).

Chairman Mboya, before introducing Nkrumah at the opening plenary session, set a powerful tone for the conference by emphasising its historic role in rejecting colonialism and marking a new era of African self-determination:

The significance of this conference is that whereas seventy-two years ago in Berlin the scramble for Africa started, today in Accra we announce to the world that those same powers which met to decide on the partitioning of Africa will, from here, from this conference be told in a firm, clear and definite voice: 'Scram from Africa'. (cited in Grant 1973, 284)

In his welcoming speech, Nkrumah stressed that he was addressing the conference not as the Prime Minister of Ghana, but as the chairman of the party (Convention People's Party). He expressed pride in the gathering of 'comrades-in-arms,' noting that they were assembled 'on African soil for the first time,' and declared the conference the dawn of a 'new epoch' on the continent (Nkrumah 1958b, 1). He emphasised that the conference aimed to inspire the total liberation of Africa through non-violent means. However, Nkrumah also stressed that achieving liberation from direct colonial rule was only a partial solution to the continent's challenges. He argued that a broader goal of unity was essential for protecting Africa's long-term interests

and effectively addressing shared problems. He laid out this vision through a four-stage plan for Africa's future: achieving independence, solidifying freedom and self-rule, establishing a unified community of free African states, and undertaking the economic and social reconstruction of the continent. Nkrumah expressed hope that the Ghana-Guinea union would serve as a nucleus for a united West Africa, asserting that 'only in the interdependence of such African unity can we truly safeguard our individual national freedom' (6). Nkrumah articulated his continental Pan-African stance by asserting that 'Africa is a Continent on its own ... it is not an extension of Europe or any other continent. We want, therefore, to develop our own community and African Personality' (6). Nkrumah's most controversial remark came at the end of his speech when he warned, 'do not, let us also forget that colonialism and imperialism may come to us yet in a different guise – not necessarily from Europe' (8). This statement was widely interpreted as suggesting that Egypt might have been the implied focus of his criticism (Cook 1959).

After Nkrumah's speech, messages of support were announced, including those from Khrushchev and Chou En-Lai. However, as McCray (1959) noted, Khrushchev's two-page telegram was not read at the conference. Nkrumah was disappointed that Washington sent no message until the last day, when Vice President Nixon finally sent a personal note to Nkrumah, rather than to the conference, following pressure from Congressman Diggs and Claude Barnett (Houser 1958; Robeson 1959). Cook (1959) interpreted Nkrumah's disappointment as a sign of his desire to align with Western powers, while McCray (1959) viewed it as frustration over America's lack of recognition for the AAPC. In the afternoon, the conference transitioned into committee sessions. Five committees were established to draft resolutions on each agenda topic of the conference (Mphahlele 1960). Each committee met in closed sessions and provided daily reports to the main conference.

### **The question of violence**

In the mornings, heads of delegations addressed the conference, each denouncing colonialism and advocating for freedom, independence, and pan-African unity. On December 9th, following speeches by Mboya and the Ethiopian delegate, Franz Fanon, then known as Dr. Omar Fanon, delivered a speech that significantly changed tone of the conference. He argued that Africans should use any available means, including 'force and violence,' to secure freedom from colonial rule. Fanon turned Nkrumah's non-violent ethics of 'positive action' on its head. According to Mphahlele (1960, 38), 'In staccato French' Fanon carried 'his audience to the horrible scene of French atrocities on Algerians'. Fanon argued that '... in our fight for freedom, we should embark on plans effective enough to touch the pulse of the imperialists – by force of action and, indeed, violence' (cited in Grant 1973, 288). He added, 'The colonialists – English and the French – had accused themselves by their policies and doctrines of the domination of Africa' He concluded by saying 'And In our fight against colonialism and imperialism, we must constitute ourselves into a national front, against inhumanity and poverty' (Grant 1973). He further highlighted, 'The colonial structural resemblance [*sic*] could be seen at its worst in Algeria. The enemy is powerful and there is the possibility of continuing its manoeuvres to cripple our plans for freedom' (Grant 1973).

Fanon's speech received the loudest and longest ovation of all the speakers and was hailed as the highlight of the session (Mphahlele 1960). Mboya made 'repeated and importunate appeals' (Potekhin 1959, 88) for non-violent while also emphasising the need to acknowledge the specific colonial experiences of different nations. The Liberian delegation emerged as the sole group openly opposed to violence, citing concerns about sovereignty. According to Mphahlele (1960, 38), the Liberian leader 'dragged the tone down' when stating, 'it is evident that the conference wants to pull independent states like his into violence and thus interfere with the

sovereignty of such states.’ Although Mphahlele (1960) did not elaborate on the claim, he suggested that the delegation of the powerful National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Nnamdi Azikiwe’s party, walked out in protest. Similar unease was later expressed by American fraternal delegates. Criticising Fanon’s provocative stance as promoting ‘shoals of extremism,’ Cook contrasted Fanon’s approach with Mboya’s more measured perspective. Cook (1959) praised Mboya as the African leader of the future and compared him favourably to Martin Luther King Jr. The Russian delegate Potekhin (1959, 88), on the other hand, noted that Mboya’s insistence on non-violence produced an ‘extremely unfavourable impression’ due to the political context of Kenya at the time, with the British massacre of Kenyans and Jomo Kenyatta being in prison. Yet, in his official role as conference chair, Mboya, unlike Fanon, likely perceived it as his responsibility to ensure unity by navigating the complexities related to violence.

Yet, by all accounts, as Potekhin (1959, 88) reported, Fanon’s speech changed ‘the mood of the delegates ... radically’ and thrust violence to the forefront of the conference. The speech became a sensation, sparking rumours among diplomats, consular staff, and delegates in Accra. In the evening at a press conference Mboya reiterated Ghanaian position that the conference would not accept violence as its policy. ‘We do not and will not accept violence as our policy’ ... the stand of the conference two pronged ‘we want to be free and we are going to free ourselves’ and secondly ‘non-violence’ (Evening News 1958c).

The next day, Fanon’s photo appeared on the front page of the evening news along with excerpts from his speech (Evening News 1958d). Throughout the week, debates on non-violence took centre stage. Ghanaian representatives, for their part, adhered steadfastly to a commitment to non-violence. On December 11th, Kojo Botsio, Ghana’s Foreign Affairs Minister, ardently defended this position, stating, ‘With the united will of the people behind you the power of the imperialists can be destroyed without the use of violence’ (Duncan 1959, 31). His speech was highlighted in the Evening News (1958e) with the headline, ‘Non-Violence is Our Creed – Botsio.’ However, Fanon’s case for the necessity and utility of violence seemed to have already swayed a great deal of delegates and inhibited the formulation of a clear stance and consensus. Throughout the conference, the Algerians stood out as bold and fearless advocates for the cause of anti-colonialism. Later, Fanon described the Algerian experience at AAPC as the ‘epic of Africa’ (Fanon 1967, 150) because ‘Every Algerian delegate was received as one who is expelling the fear, the trembling, the inferiority complex, from the flesh of the colonized’ (151).

The conference faced its most intense challenge at the committee level during the drafting of resolutions. According to Mphahlele (1960), by Wednesday afternoon, rumours were circulating that Committee One engaged in a heated argument over whether violence or passive resistance should be employed in the fight against colonialism. The Algerians, led by Fanon, insisted on the establishment of a Pan-African army, an African Legion, ‘consisting of volunteers who will be ready to protect the freedom of the African peoples.’ Fanon later wrote the idea was to ‘create a corps of volunteers in all the territories the African peoples’ because ‘national liberation is linked to the liberation of the continent.’ He framed ‘the African legion, the principle of which was adopted in Accra, is the concrete response of the African peoples to the will to colonial domination of the Europeans’ (Fanon 1967, 156).

Fanon’s second visit to Africa provides a clearer insight into his ideas about unity, a pan-African army, and revolutionary decolonisation. In 1960, he returned to Accra as the appointed Ambassador of FLN. During this time, he took on himself of finding an alternative southern supply route Algerian resistance, as the routes to the interior of Algeria through Morocco and Tunisia were blocked by the French army. He embarked on an arduous journey along Mali frontier with the mission of conducting reconnaissance and establishing a supply basis. In his

posthumously published logbook entry ‘This Africa to Come,’ he gives us a hint of what his vision and mission for the African Legion and African unity might look like:

Our mission: to open the southern front. To transport arms and munitions from Bamako. Stir up the Saharan population, infiltrate to the Algerian high plateaus. After carrying Algeria to the four corners of Africa, move up with all Africa toward African Algeria, toward the North, toward Algiers, the continental city. What I should like: great lines, great navigation channels through the desert. Subdue the desert, deny it, assemble Africa, create the continent. That Malians, Senegalese, Guineans, Ghanaians should descend from Mali onto our territory. And those of the Ivory Coast, of Nigeria, of Togoland. That they should all climb the slopes of the desert and pour over the colonialist bastion. To turn the absurd and the impossible inside out and hurl a continent against the last ramparts of colonial power. (Fanon 1967, 180–181)

While he never overtly tied the Algerian cause to Pan-Africanism, he envisioned the pivotal role of Pan-African unity in the context of a collective revolutionary uprising of the oppressed nations, ‘the wretched of the earth,’ against their colonial oppressors (Young 2005). In a way, for Fanon, the Algerian quest for independence, symbiotic with the pursuit of freedom from colonial oppression everywhere, was a crucial condition for the peaceful African future to which the Accra Conference was committed.

In the end, Fanon’s aspirations for securing a commitment to a pan-African army were not realised at the Conference. However, discussions on a collective defence system persisted into the second AAPC in January 1960. The idea of pan-African army briefly found a semblance of realisation with Ghana’s appeal in February 1960 for citizens to enlist in the ‘Algerian Volunteer Brigade.’ Despite generating substantial local enthusiasm and international attention, no volunteers participated in Algerian or other anticolonial conflicts (Ahlman 2010). The idea nonetheless influenced the establishment of the African Liberation Committee at the founding meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 in Addis Ababa. At Accra, the Algerians managed to achieve a compromise with the final resolutions, extending support to all freedom fighters in Africa, regardless of the methods they employed in their pursuit of national independence and freedom, particularly those who felt compelled to employ violence.

Beyond the issue of violence, the conference witnessed deepening divisions over African unity and tribalism. Chief Anthony Enaboro of the Action Group (AG) of Nigeria, in his plenary address, outrightly dismissed Nkrumah’s proposal to create a commonwealth of African states as impractical. He argued,

to expect the Federation of French Equatorial Africa, the Cameroons, Togoland, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gambia, and the federation of Nigeria, with a total population of over 60 million people to ‘adhere’ to a union predetermined by Ghana and Guinea, with a population of 6 million ... (Evening News 1958f)

According to Hoskyns (1959), Nigerian delegates in the fourth committee expressed similar discontent and urged Nkrumah to consult with them before advancing the regional unity project. They echoed Chief Enaboro’s skepticism that newly independent countries would automatically join the Ghana and Guinea union. Nigeria’s position foreshadowed the stance Independent Nigeria would assume in the lead-up to the Addis Ababa Summit. Chief Enaboro, holding a traditional title himself, also deplored any unqualified condemnation of tribalism (Evening News 1958f).

George Padmore’s longstanding stance against tribalism, which significantly influenced Nkrumah’s thinking (Grilli 2018a; James 2015), was another significant source of division at the conference. The call to the conference, written by Padmore, from the outset called for

‘exposure of, and an onslaught upon, the propagators of Tribalism’, regarding tribal leaders as ‘the most dangerous black agents of the Imperialists, for it is their poisonous policy of inciting Africans against Africans’ (cited in Potekhin 1959, 88–89). According to Potekhin (1959), the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) of Nigeria, led by Sardauna of Sokoto, possibly offended by the denunciation, opted for abstention from participating in the conference. Throughout the conference, slogans condemning tribalism were prominently displayed. Robeson (1959, 13) reported that anti-tribal slogans caught her attention, and upon inquiry, she discovered that Africans aimed to ‘end inter-tribal hostility, the corruption of chieftainship, but wanted to preserve the best aspects of tribal organisation – the communal ownership and collective working of the land, and the practical and moral influence of responsible chiefs.’ This denouncement was not welcomed by the West African conservative establishment. Chief Enaboro, holding a traditional title himself, also criticised any unqualified condemnation of tribalism (Evening News 1958f). Another influential Nigerian party, Azikiwe’s NCNC, denounced the simplistic and materialistic stance of the conference regarding how aspects of cultural tribal life were preserved. The party argued that African communal life involved not only communal ownership of land but also practices such as ancestor worship (West Africa 1958).

In the end, the committees grappled with the diverse views of the delegates on the contentious topics of the conference to produce resolutions that could achieve widespread consensus. After a marathon session that extended until 3 am on the final day of the conference, a compromise resolution was reached. The last plenary session kicked off on Saturday with lively singing, led by the chairman of the entertainment committee – an American dentist – enthusiastically guiding everyone in a rendition of ‘Gimme that old Freedom Spirit ... It was good for Mother England ... and it’s good enough for me ...’ (Drake 1959, 6) The South African delegation, with Michael Scott as an honoured guest, sang ‘God Bless Africa’ in the Zulu language. Nkrumah, dressed in Ghana Kente cloth, was then escorted to the platform, and his Finance Minister, K.A. Gbedemah, led the audience in singing ‘There Is Victory for Us ...’ (6). In his farewell remarks, Nkrumah urged the delegates to work diligently and persistently until Africa is liberated from colonial domination.

### **Ambiguous legacies**

While the various perspectives, radical and moderate, at the conference did not coalesce into a unified pan-African ideology, most delegates showed remarkable commitment to Africa charting its own independent path. Broadly speaking, it can be argued that Pan-Africanism truly yet momentarily realised its core, that is, the political project of asserting an independent voice on African affairs. Although most of the delegates had decidedly Marxist political orientations ‘there was little sign of Marxism ... There were no expressions of devotion to the great Soviet Union nor were any lessons drawn from there or from China’ (West Africa 1958). The Russians were displeased with the limited discussions on communism. The conference did not heed Du Bois’ exhortation for Africa to align with the East rather than the capitalist West (Du Bois 1958). The organisers disregarded protests from the Chinese delegation regarding the display of the Chinese Nationalist flag in the conference (D.W. 1959). Egypt was successfully prevented from dragging the conference into the issue of the Middle East (West Africa 1958). Some American delegates and observers, such as Mercer Cook, were unsettled by the conference’s radical tone. They interpreted Nkrumah’s promotion of continental Pan-Africanism as a deliberate tactic to navigate between East and West. Viewing Africa exclusively through the Cold War paradigm, they inadvertently perceived the continent merely as a battleground dominated by the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union (Cook 1959; Munger 1962).

The conference left an indelible mark, significantly shaping the political consciousness and possibilities of solidarity for the participants. Fanon’s (1967: 154) reflection on the event

conveyed the overwhelming feeling of collective effervescence and connections between delegates:

What struck the observer at Accra was the existence at the most spontaneous level of a solidarity that is organic, even biological. But above this kind of affective communion there was the concern to affirm an identity of objectives and also the determination to use all existing means to banish colonialism from the African continent.

These visceral and affective dimensions of solidarity forged among participants in the conference goes beyond an affective sense of *esprit de corps*, naturally shared by comrades-in-arms under colonial rule. The conference ignited the anti-colonial thrust, generating ripple effects of resistance and aspirations for freedom from colonial rule. Pan-Africanism reached a national stage. The delegates returned with a renewed understanding of the need for trans-national solidarity, equipped with revolutionary ideologies, and the language of self-determination. The AAPC transformed Patrice Lumumba from a Kinshasa beer seller and colonial sympathiser into an anti-colonial radical Pan-Africanist, shaping him into the memorable and influential figure we recognise in the public consciousness today. Due to the prohibition of Marxist publications in the Belgian Congo, Lumumba was unfamiliar with radical revolutionary ideologies. His formative approach to the struggle against colonialism was solely from the perspective of African nationalism. As Williams (2021, 97) notes, for Lumumba, the AAPC served as ‘a personal and political epiphany,’ exposing him to Nkrumah and fostering his friendship with Frantz Fanon. Just two weeks after the conference, Lumumba’s profound transformation was readily apparent. He organised a rally to report on the conference and explain its resolutions. The colonial administration, shocked by its success, prohibited his party from holding future public gatherings.

In Southern Africa, the conference signalled continuation of colonial rule politically untenable. It helped ignite national sentiment in Nyasaland, leading to violence in February 1959 that spread to Southern Rhodesia (The Scotsman 1959). Nationalist leaders from Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia, and Southern Rhodesia coordinated mass demonstrations and called for the dissolution of the white settler-dominated Central African Federation. Prime Minister Roy Welensky blamed the conference and Nkrumah, a criticism Nkrumah embraced, stating he was ‘proud to know that Ghana is a symbol of hope and aspiration to Africa’ (cited in Thompson 1969, 62). The AAPC not only catalysed anti-colonial protests but also significantly influenced the ideological development of political parties in Southern Africa (Grilli 2020). Leaders like Ntsu Mokhehle, Kenneth Kaunda, Hastings Banda, and Ndabaningi Sithole drew inspiration from Nkrumah’s ideas, closely aligning themselves with his pan-Africanist principles. Following the AAPC, Ghana expanded its support beyond ideological influence to include practical aid in hosting political refugees, providing financial assistance, scholarships, and operational support for Southern Africa’s liberation movements (Grilli 2018b).

The conference laid bare the precarity and limitations of the radical vision of Pan-Africanism. The conference, while striving to create solidarity, it inadvertently exacerbated divisions among, especially, west African political leaders. From the early stages of preparation, the conference’s agendas of pursuing socialism and renunciation of tribalism triggered profound mistrust among conservative Nigerians and Liberians. Tubman would later emerge as the principal organiser of the so-called Monrovia group of conservative states. The deep-seated mistrust extended notably between Nkrumah and the consistent rejection of Nkrumah’s ideas by the Nigerian Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, of NPC. This strained relationship was evident not only during the OAU foundation in 1963 but also persisted at the first OAU conference in Cairo in 1964 (Thompson 1969).

Francophone nationalists were mainly represented by minority dissidents who opposed Charles de Gaulle's new constitution and the institution of the French community. The exception was the presence of four delegates from Léopold Senghor's *Union Progressiste Sénégalaise*, led by the future Senegalese foreign minister Doudou Thiam. Cook (1959) reported that the absence of proper translation relegated French-speaking delegates to a spectator position. The powerful the French West African party *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (RDA) did not send delegation. This may not be surprising, given that RDAs leader, Houphouët-Boigny, held a position in the French cabinet. In an interview with *Le Monde* on January 3, 1959, Léopold Sédar Senghor lamented the non-participation of major political parties. Importantly, he did not express this criticism in the expected terms of missed opportunities for solidarity transcending linguistic divisions. Instead, he expressed regret that the absence of significant francophone voices allowed 'minority parties to practice demagoguery' regarding the situation in French-speaking states. Senghor completely misinterpreted the pan-African agenda of the conference, framing it as a clash of traditions between French-speaking and English-speaking cultures. While expressing a readiness to criticise France, when necessary, Senghor insists 'we cannot allow pan-African conferences to condemn France while whitewashing Anglo-Saxon colonialism. Nor we can accept English as the official language of pan-African conferences' (cited in Cook 1959, 3). He firmly asserted his cultural and intellectual affinity for the French language and traditions 'We respect English but we prefer French culture, which we consider more progressive and more humanistic' (3). Senghor upheld assumptions about the French Republican tradition as the basis upon which EurAfrican (Wilder 2015) civilisation could be built. This foundation rested on the idea of equality between French Africa and metropolitan France, rather than adhering to pan-African anti-colonial socialism, which defied imperialist assertions.

The APPC significantly influenced the trajectory of African decolonisation and the formation of institutions and alliances. Two additional AAPCs were held in Tunis in January 1960 and in Cairo in March 1961, bringing together liberation movements. In the lead-up to the Tunis meeting, a political split occurred when Nkrumah attempted to oust Mboya from the chairmanship of the AAPC in favour of a Tunisian due to a disagreement over labour organisation affiliation. Mboya was eventually replaced by Guinean Abdoulaye Diallo, who later became the first Secretary-General of the OAU. Meanwhile, at the second CIAS in June 1960 in Addis Ababa, Nigeria and Ghana clashed when Ghana pressed for the acceptance of the Sanniquellie Declaration – an agreement between Ghana, Guinea, and Liberia for the Community of Independent African States – as the basis of continental unity (Thompson 1969). Ghana's proposal was rejected by all, including by the signatory Liberia, except Guinea. Although the Addis Ababa Conference accepted the Algerian provisional government, the Tunis Conference reaffirmed the Fanonian approach of defensive violence.

The anti-French, pro-Algerian stance of the AAPCs further alienated French-speaking Africans. The Francophone states formed the Brazzaville Group through meetings starting in Abidjan in October 1960. Initially focused on mediating the Algerian conflict without damaging relations with France, their discussions broadened to address economic cooperation and mutual defense, solidifying their positions in meetings held in Brazzaville, Dakar, Yaoundé, and Tananarive between 1960 and 1961, culminating in the *Union africaine et malgache* (UAM) (Wallerstein 2005). Political divisions were intensified by the Congo crisis and Lumumba's assassination (Williams 2021), prompting Ghana, Tunisia, Egypt, Guinea, and Morocco to create the Casablanca Group in January 1961. Meanwhile, conservative English-speaking states joined the Brazzaville Group, which later evolved into the Monrovia Group and transformed the UAM into the Inter-African and Malagasy States Organization (IAMSOS) (Wallerstein 2005). At this juncture, the trajectory of Padmorean Pan-Africanism waned, and contrary to prevalent depictions, the Casablanca Group did not coalesce into an alliance pursuing African unity. With



Algeria's liberation and the gradual dissipation of political differences between the two groups, only Nkrumah steadfastly adhered to African political unity (Gerits 2023; Wallerstein 2005).

## Conclusion

The AAPC is an example of assertion of agency of African actors. It represented a pan-African experiment aimed at overcoming colonisation, and the historical exclusion of Africa by collectively pressing for equal representation in global politics. While the conference planted the seeds of division by challenging conservative voices, it simultaneously compelled them to adopt, subsequently reinterpret, and redeploy pan-Africanism to contest the legitimacy of colonial rule and think about African unity. The AAPC was both productive and performative. As a momentous political event, it cultivated a critical anti-colonial collective consciousness, shaped new forms of political subjectivities, and established new networks of solidarity. In a significant way, pan-Africanism found expression through the AAPC. The organisers shaped their agenda, utilised their own resources, followed their own scripts to assert organisational and ideological independence throughout the conference. Nevertheless, this assertion of pan-African agency is just one moment in the long historical process of appropriation and contestation Pan-Africanism had yet to acquire new meanings in the 1960s, evolving to signify unity as it became entwined with the debates surrounding the political union of the continent. Subsequently, its prevalent usage, particularly in popular parlance, came to predominantly denote political unity.

The fluidity of the concept brings us back to the methodological questions about how to conceptualise and study the practical and political life of Pan-Africanism. While recognising the necessity of historicising the concept as its meaning changes over time, this article argued that pan-Africanism is better understood within the specificity of a particular time and political circumstances. It is better located in time by attending to specific political contexts – particular events, histories, or interactions – where it is constituted and emerges as an organising concept, a significant object of knowledge, and praxis. Such an approach underscores the importance of avoiding a teleological definition that attributes to it a predetermined, pure instrumentality, which may not closely align with the historical and specificity of the idea.

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