

## **Pan-Africanism as a Problematic Effort at Decolonization: Considering the Complexities and Contradictions of Some Critical Pan-African Actors.**

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### **Abstract.**

*This paper presents a discussion of the complexities and contradictions in the teachings and actions of some of the black/African figures, who have historically made efforts to decolonize the global black/African masses through the Pan-African method. The figures that I present are Marcus Garvey, W.E.B DuBois, and Maulana Karenga. The argument made in this paper is that these Pan-Africanists' ways of thinking and doing were complex and, at times, conflicted with the Pan-African thought, which they sought to champion. Some of the factors that made the decolonizing efforts of the aforesaid Pan-Africanists complex and contradictory to Pan-Africanism were the westernization of their consciousness, a lack of understanding of African cultures, autocratic motives, self-defeating schisms, and politics that ostracized black/African women.*

**Key Words:** Pan-Africanism; Decolonization; Colonization; Pan-Negroism; Garveyism; Marcus Garvey; W.E.B DuBois; Maulana Karenga; US Organization; Black Panthers; African Diaspora; Cultural nationalism; Revolutionary politics; Westernization; UNIA; Culture; Education; African cultural heritage; Africa; Races; Cultural alienation; Pan-African congresses.

*African Cultural Heritage and African Pride is the Foundation of Pan Africanism*

~Jeremie Kroubo Dagnini

### **1. Introduction.**

The quotation above highlights a critical element of Pan-Africanism, which is, that it should be predicated on pride in African-ness. However, I note that this element is lacking in the teachings and actions of various Pan-Africanists. Herein, I investigate the complexities and contradictions in the teachings and actions of some of the black/African figures, who have historically made efforts to decolonize the global black/African masses through the Pan-African method. The figures that I present are Marcus Garvey, W.E.B DuBois, and Maulana Karenga. These Pan-Africanists' ways of thinking and doing at times conflicted with the Pan-African ideal. Some of the factors that made their decolonizing efforts complex and contradictory to Pan-Africanism were the westernization of their consciousness, a lack of understanding of African cultures, autocratic motives, self-defeating schisms, and politics that ostracized black/African women.

### **2. Pan-Africanism: A Definition of the Concept.**

Prior to my discussion of the contradictions and complexities that characterize the aforesaid Pan-African thinkers, I will define Pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism is a philosophy and political thought that sought to liberate black/African people across the globe from racial oppression, by emphasizing their unity in struggle and through a recognition of Africa as their place of origin (Malisa and Nhengeze, 2018; Warren, 1990; Garvey, 2016; DuBois, 1971). The philosophy and political thought were formulated by black/African peoples of the diaspora. Note that throughout this essay I use *black* and *African* as identical concepts, for this is how these terms were used in Pan-Africanism (Malisa and Nhengeze, 2018). As indicated above, Pan-Africanism was both a philosophy and a political thought. As a philosophy, it emerged from the intellectualism of W.E.B DuBois, with his concept of Pan-Negroism (see Appiah, 2006). As a political thought, it gained momentum through the Pan-African congresses, which were orchestrated by a Jamaican barrister who lived in London, Henry Sylvester (DuBois, 1971, p. 124). Sylvester organized the first Pan-African conference in London in 1900, which was attended by various black/African peoples from the diaspora including W.E.B DuBois.

### **3. Pan-Africanism and Racial Liberation.**

Black/African thinkers became invested in the Pan-African philosophy/politics because the oppressive reality of black/African people globally corroborated the observation of W.E.B DuBois (1971), that "the problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the problem of the color line" (p. 125). What DuBois meant here is that humanity wasn't united. Instead, people were being segregated on the bases of race, which meant that skin color birthed racial discrimination. DuBois made this argument in the first Pan-African conference.

DuBois' words rang true as black/African peoples came to the realization that both in Africa and in the diaspora, they were oppressed and subjugated by white people, because of their black skin color. DuBois' thoughts were significant in describing social, political, and economic relations amongst black/African people and white people. He exposed that the relations between said races were predicated not on the Hobbesian social contract (DK, 2013), but the racial contract. Whereas the social contract defines egalitarianism of races in society, the racial contract champions white supremacy (Mills, 1997). As a result, it was critical for black/African people to devise means to liberate themselves from racial discrimination as a group. To that effect, Pan-African figures had differing methods, which at times, contradicted the Pan-African philosophy, which is to have pride in African-ness, as indicated earlier.

#### **4. Pan-Africanism and Garveyism**

One of the Pan-Africanists who made efforts to liberate black/African people from racial oppression across the world was Marcus Mosiah Garvey. Garvey was a Jamaican national who was a writer, journalist, and "undoubtedly the greatest black orator of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Dagnini, 2008, p. 204). Driven by his urge to liberate black/African people from the chains of racial oppression by white people, Marcus Garvey (1986) writes that he formed the United Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A) in his Jamaican homeland in July of 1914 (p. 118). Importantly, Garvey was influenced by ideas of some black/African thinkers such as Booker T. Washington in the United States of America (Dagnini, 2008, p. 199). Garvey formed the U.N.I.A from the model of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, as he desired to have his own organization that would enlighten and lead black/African people towards freedom. With the intentions of meeting Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey set sail for the United States of America in 1916. Unfortunately, Booker T. Washington died before Garvey could get the opportunity to meet with him (Dagnini, 2008, p. 200). Because of his great leadership and oratory qualities, which made him "an extraordinary leader of men" (DuBois, 1971, p. 61), Garvey amassed a large black/African following, not only in the USA but globally. He established the offices for the U.N.I.A in Harlem, New York (Garvey, 1986, p. 119).

##### **4.1. Garvey's Back to Africa Call.**

Marcus Garvey's doctrine regarding the liberation of black/African peoples was that political, cultural, and economic freedom was only achievable if they returned to Africa, to found and establish for themselves a black nation, free and separate from the West. He expressed this philosophy in his slogan "Africa for the Africans" (Garvey, p. 6). As it should be evident, Garvey's rhetoric observed Africa as a continent to be claimed only by black/African people and simultaneously suggested that they belonged nowhere else, but Africa. Thus, he called for their departure from the lands to which they were forcibly shipped by white people through the Transatlantic slave trade, the New World. Marcus Garvey (2016) believed that no race could ever achieve freedom under the jurisdiction and control of another race (p.6); hence, it was only in Africa that the black/African peoples could rule themselves and then establish industries and factories, and thus gain socio-economic independence (p. 35). For black/African peoples to achieve their socio-economic independence in Africa, Garvey said, it would prove that "whatsoever man has done, man can do." Here, Garvey meant that everything that white people had achieved in the West, black/African people could also achieve in Africa. In other words, his vision of the freedom of the black/African peoples was to demonstrate that Africa and its people could replicate models of European civilization (Dagnini, 2008). Again, Marcus Garvey (2016) displays this desire when he articulates that, "we will give up the vain desire of having a seat in the White House of America, of having a seat in the house of Lords in England, of being President of France, for the chance and opportunity of filling these positions in a country of our own" (p. 8). Garvey makes it clear that his plan was to transplant to and maintain Euro-American socio-political structures in Africa.

##### **5. Colonial Aspects of Garvey's Pan-African Thought.**

Clearly, Garvey's notion was that black/African peoples should demonstrate their capability to do the things that white people in the West had done, to prove that they were equal to white people in skill and thought. At first glance, this seems to be a liberatory effort for black/African peoples, as it would establish them as equal to the white race, but a closer reading of this idea would reveal that Garvey's thoughts were not Pan-African, nor liberatory for black/African peoples. Here is why I take issue with Garvey's thoughts: instead of decolonizing the black/African people, he was fixated on an intent to *prove* to white people that black/African peoples could replicate Western civilization in Africa. This is evident when Garvey (2016) proposes that "we are men, human beings, capable of the same acts as any other race" (p. 9). First, what acts was Garvey referring to since the white civilization that he was modeling after had committed so many atrocious acts against humanity, including colonization and enslavement of black/African peoples? Secondly and clearly, Garvey did not understand that racial equality is not decolonization. Whereas racial equality is about black/African people ascending to the standards of Euro-American civilization, decolonization is about fostering new ways of living (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Another problem with Garvey's suggestion that Africa should be developed based on the Western paradigm is that, that suggestion was a black stamp officiating the Westernization of Africa. Additionally, it meant that only Western modes constituted civilization.

It then becomes clear that Garvey's ideas were un-African and implied that black/African people had no capacity to devise other ways of living, thinking, and doing separate from the West, which would be a true decolonization, since decolonization is about "undoing [Western colonial systems] and redoing [your own systems]; ..." (Mignolo, 2018, p. 120, brackets mine). Further, Garvey's notions were problematic and contrary to Pan-Africanism, because having black/African peoples replicate or maintain Western civilization in Africa made them perpetual cultural students of white people (Biko, 2002, p. 94).

Steve Biko argues that this produced a society where black/African life is invariably judged on the standards of the Europeans. Biko's argument enlightens one on the realization that we presently do not have a black/African culture. In fact, we are a people who have been caught up in what Steve Biko (2002) calls, "bastard cultures" (p. 95). As Biko argues, these are cultures that were left behind when colonialism and slavery collided with African cultures. Ndabaningi Sithole (1968) agrees with Biko's views, as he expresses that since colonialism, there has not been real Africans in the continent of Africa itself (p. 98). From these views, I note that the continent of Africa is no longer populated by Africans, but simply by people in Africa, because African traditions have been long shunned for the White Western ways. Where not shunned, African customs are despised and seen as backward by Africans themselves. Consequently, the manners of eating, dressing, speaking, schooling, etc, are primarily European, which caused the cultural disappearance of "the Africans" (Mazrui, 1986).

This fact is observed by Ali Mazrui (1986), when he states that African leaders, post-independence made the mistake of trying to build Africa in European ways without any consideration of African traditional cultures, which has resulted in a curse from the ancestors (p. 12). I will argue here that part of any decolonial efforts, should not be to imitate white people, but to establish an/other culture that we can call black/African. However, I do not by any means suggest that we should make efforts to go back to traditional African cultures, for this would be a futile attempt, but we can draw from some African epistemologies that are still in existence. Such epistemologies as the philosophy of ubuntu, which Desmond Tutu constantly recognized as the spirit of black/African people. The situation that we have in Africa today, that of not having *Africans* but *people in Africa*, is the same situation that Garvey's philosophy of building Africa on Western standards was bound to produce. Simply put, Garvey's vision of Africa would be nothing different from the status quo in the continent, which is characterized by failing political, social, and economic systems because they are not African.

Equally problematic as his idea to develop Africa following Western models, is that Garvey declared himself as "his excellency, the Provisional President of Africa".<sup>1</sup> This is contradictory to the Pan-African ideology also, because for Garvey to declare himself de facto president of Africa was a sign that his mission was not only to liberate black/African peoples, but to rule as the head of the African nation himself. And this was to be a neo-colonization of the black/African people in the African continent. This view is supported by Kehinde Andrews (2019) who has argued that Pan-Africanism was colonialism with a black face, meaning that it was an effort to colonize Africa with the descendants of the enslaved Africans in the West. That Garvey presented as provisional president of Africa raises questions about his true motives towards the repatriation of black/African people of the diaspora to continental Africa. Was Marcus Garvey concerned with the liberation of black/African masses or was he a man who had Tsarist fantasies to fulfil in the land of Africa? In other words, was his work a decolonial project or an obsession to turn himself into an emperor to lord over the black/African masses once they had united in Africa?

### **6. Intellectual Colonization of Marcus Garvey.**

One can reasonably contend that Garvey had a colonist agenda to rule over the black/African masses in Africa. I draw this assumption not only from the fact that he declared himself de facto president of Africa, but also from his inclinations to dress like some European emperor. Garvey had a predilection to don a "Napoleon-like uniform with a plumed hat" (Dagnini, 2008, p. 205), which led to Colin Grants' book, about Garvey's life, getting the title *The Negro with a hat*. Garvey's dressing was contrary to his Pan-Africanist rhetoric. Instead of wearing European emperor like clothing, Garvey should have "worn African traditional attire as Jomo Kenyatta or Kwame Nkrumah proudly did" (Dagnini, 2008, p. 205). Wearing European emperor clothing was one of the signs that Garvey lacked African cultural pride, which should have been a fundamental aspect of a Pan-African image. Wearing African attires would have grounded Garvey's image in the African cultural heritage and served as a flag that represented what he stood for, Pan-Africanism. Nonetheless, I do not mean that dressing in African patterns always means that one is Pan-African, as it can just be one's preferred style of dress, because Pan-Africanism is not dress code but a consciousness, which Marcus Garvey lacked.

The reason that Marcus Garvey lacked a Pan-African consciousness was that, like several other Pan-African thinkers, he was suffering from what Jeremie Kroubo Dagnini (2008) calls, "intellectual colonization" (p. 206). This refers to the fact that these Pan-African thinkers were mentally colonized by Western education, which is a phenomenon that Ngugi WaThiong'o (1986) observes in his *Decolonization of the mind*, when he notes that Western education created colonial or cultural alienation in black/African peoples (p. 28).

What is observable about Pan-African thinkers like Garvey is that, although they were great agitators, their ideas were neither African nor decolonial. This is ironic if one thinks of how Marcus Garvey preached to the black/African masses to free themselves from mental slavery as none but themselves could free their minds (Dagnini, 2008, p. 206) when he was mentally mired in Western colonial chains himself. This was a case of Garvey seeing the speck in his brother's eye but failing to notice the beam in his own eye (Luke 6:41).

Another element that spells out Garvey's mental colonization is the fact that he constantly suggested that the advancement of black/African masses should be achieved through Western education. He urged the black/African masses to "Read! Read! Read!

And never stop until you discover the knowledge of the universe" (cited in Dagnini, 2008, p. 204). It is clear that Garvey's idea of education recognized written literature as the legitimate knowledge or the only means of knowledge dissemination, which concurrently overlooked or dismissed orature, the primary mode for knowledge creation and sharing for traditional Africans (WaThiongo, 1986; Finnegan, 2012; Ogundokun, 2015; Onebune, 2018). Nevertheless, written literature was the only means of education that Garvey would taunt since that is how he got educated himself. Moving on, another issue with Garvey's taunting of European education as a method to liberate the black/African masses is raised by Jeremie Dagnini. Dagnini (2008) writes that, "the danger that lies in seeing education as the only and best means to succeed in life is that it implicitly undermines the status of some activity sectors such as farming to bureaucracy, which can truly have a negative impact on societies, especially in Africa" (p. 204). Thus, instead of looking towards Western education as a liberating tool, Garvey should have looked towards other, especially African, ways since he subscribed to Pan-Africanism.

### **7. W.E.B DuBois as Another Intellectually Colonized Pan-Africanist.**

It is important to note that Garvey was not alone in thinking that Western education would liberate the black/African peoples. W.E.B DuBois is another notable Pan-African thinker who believed that black/African peoples should civilize themselves through European education. DuBois believed that education and religion would propel black/African peoples to the level of white people after emancipation from slavery (Chalk, 1967). As it should be obvious, DuBois, like Garvey, was not concerned with decolonization but the attainment of racial equality, perhaps they thought that rendering themselves equal to white people was empowering. However, Pan-Africanism should not have been a politics of empowerment but decolonization and liberation of the blacks through a reconstitution of the African self. That DuBois and Garvey were praising Western education as a tool for freedom of the black/African masses is problematic because education was always bound to create elitism amongst the people, which would lead to social stratification amongst black/African people. What I note here is that elitism would then lead to the so-called educated oppressing the so-called uneducated masses. This is the situation that we see occurring today across Africa, where the educated politicians use their intellectualism to play trick or treat with the masses, where they treat the masses with tricks, such as lies and deceit.

#### **7.1 Detrimental Rifts Between Garvey and DuBois.**

Although Garvey and DuBois both advocated for education as a trajectory to liberate and develop the black/African masses, they had rivalling ideologies in that the former championed a racial separatist attitude, whereas the latter was an integrationist (Chalk, 1967). This led to enmity between the two black/African leaders, perhaps because of the competition for the black/African audience. It should be obvious that the rivalry between Garvey and DuBois already spelled out a contradiction to Pan-Africanism, since Pan-Africanism was about black unity not self-defeating schisms. DuBois viewed it as madness that Garvey called for black/African people in the diaspora to be repatriated to Africa. Their contradicting approaches later resulted in DuBois' efforts to use his organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) newspaper *The Crisis* to assassinate Garvey's character. According to Frank Chalk (1967), in May of 1924, DuBois professed that, "Marcus Garvey is, without doubt, the most dangerous enemy of the Negro race in America and in the world. He is either a lunatic or a 'traitor' who 'should be locked up' or sent home" (p. 139). However, in his book, W.E.B DuBois (1971) denied these allegations and argued that he only criticized Garvey's methods as "bombastic, wasteful, illogical and almost illegal" (p. 62). Nevertheless, it was the vitriolic statements by DuBois that led to arguments that he and the NAACP played a role in the arrest and deportation of Marcus Garvey in 1940 (Chalk, 1967). Whether these were true or not, W.E.B DuBois (1971) may have been envious of Garvey's ability to connect with the black/African masses, which he, himself, was not able to achieve, since he acknowledged that he was not "a natural leader of men" (pp. 47-48). That said, the hostility between Garvey and DuBois was a set back to their Pan-African goals, and they wouldn't be the only black/African actors to be caught in such self-defeating behaviors, as we will see as this discussion segues to Maulana Karenga and the Black Panther Party.

### **8. Maulana Karenga and the Cultural Nationalist Politics.**

Maulana Karenga was born Ronald Everett in 1941. He moved to Los Angeles to live with his brother who was working there as a teacher in 1959. Karenga became active in black nationalist politics at the age of twenty-five (Pleck, 2001, p. 7).

Unlike other Pan-African actors, who may have identified themselves as radical, such as the Black Panther Party<sup>ii</sup>, Karenga's politics was that of a cultural nationalist (Andrews, 2019; Pleck, 2001). Cultural nationalism refers to the efforts of black/African peoples in the diaspora to restore a sense of African self and identity, which was crucial since the Europeans had stripped them of their African cultures and heritage during a process known as breaking, in the slave plantations. Breaking resulted in the creation of the Negro, who was a black/African person with "no civilization, cultures, no religions, no history, no place, and finally no humanity that might command consideration" (Robinson, cited in Andrews, 2019, p. 105).

The fact that the enslaved Africans were robbed of their cultures, in the slave plantations, necessitated a politics to decolonize black/African peoples by restoring their African cultural image. Maulana Karenga formed the US Organization to work towards decolonizing the black/African masses in the said fashion.

Due to its emphasis on cultural restoration as opposed to radical political activism, cultural nationalism is said to be different from radical or revolutionary nationalism of organizations such as the Black Panthers (Andrews, 2019; Pleck, 2001, Woodard, 1999). Both radical nationalism and cultural nationalism seem to be drawing from the philosophy of Malcolm X. However, Malcolm X emphasized more so on revolutionary action and less on cultural nationalism. For this reason, Kehinde Andrews (2019) maintains that "if the Panthers were the children of Malcolm, then Karenga was his illegitimate child with no rightful claim to his legacy" (p. 104). The reason that Andrews writes this way is because traditionally there has been a tendency to favor revolutionary action over cultural nationalism because the latter is seen as benign to the white oppressive system, at best, and diverting black/African peoples' focus from real politics for their liberation, at worst (Pleck, 2001).

### **9. Complexities of Cultural Nationalist Politics.**

Karenga's Pan-African effort was to re/connect black/African peoples in the diaspora with their African roots. To this end, Karenga and US Organization advocated for black Americans to wear African cultural attires, change their names to African ones and speak KiSwahili (Andrews, 2019). These were efforts to decolonize the diasporic black/African masses by un-brainwashing them through connecting them to their long-lost African heritage. Although it was significant for black/African peoples to espouse culture as a part of the efforts to decolonize themselves, it should be noted that cultural nationalist politics were not going to liberate black/African peoples from white racism, because "the problems facing Black people worldwide are not in our minds. They are in our streets, the schools, and the political and economic system. There is no way to think, teach or drum our way to freedom" (Andrews, 2019, p. 113). Although I agree with Andrews that the problem of black/African peoples' oppression is in social structures which were built in the interest of white supremacy, I would caution against dismissing the work that Maulana Karenga and US Organization were engaged in as unproductive in black/African peoples struggle for freedom. The physical revolution that Andrews and others seem to prefer cannot and will not result in any good if the cultural and psychological dimensions of black/African peoples are not decolonized. If black/African masses engaged only in physical revolution to deliver themselves from white oppression, what would result is a situation where the revolution would give birth to freed black/African bodies devoid of being. What I am saying here is that a people's being, that which gives them a sense of self and purpose, is in their culture, that is why some writers have lamented that, to destroy a culture is to destroy a people (Fanon, 1963; WaThiong'o, 1986).

#### **9.1. Significance of Cultural Nationalism to Black/African People's Freedom Struggle.**

Cultural nationalism is an important phase of the revolution, I would say the first phase, so that when the masses revolt physically they already know what alternative reality they desire to create, that which stems from their own cultural worldview. This is important because we have had revolutions by black/African peoples in the continent of Africa from the 1950s to the 1990s, but those revolutions did not yield any freedom for the people, partly because the Africans lost ubuntu and other important aspects of their being to European colonialism. For this reason, they are running around in Africa as freed bodies without being, that explains why the political leaders in Africa do not feel any remorse when they oppress, exploit, and murder their own people (Adeleke, 1998). There is no soul in black/African people because their soul was in their cultures, which they lost to colonialism and slavery. It is; therefore, important to note that when he engaged in cultural nationalism, wearing African attire, that the Panthers called strange fashion (Pleck, 2001, p. 10), Karenga was making efforts to restore black/African peoples' *being* in the diaspora, to make them know and love themselves. Setting the revolutionary record straight, Karenga (2014) writes that he never saw cultural nationalism as separate from radical revolution but as an activity already part of the black revolution (p. 3). Therefore, the belief that cultural nationalism had no impact in efforts to decolonize black/African people is problematic.

### **10. Self-Defeating Rifts Between Cultural and Revolutionary Ideologies.**

The notion that cultural nationalism was a benign attempt at liberating black/African peoples, played a role in the rift that ensued between the Black Panthers and Karenga's US Organization. It should be noted that US meant "us" [black/African people] as opposed to "them" [white people] (Pleck, 2001; Brown, 2003, brackets mine). However, during the conflict with the Black Panthers, US was derogatorily referred to as 'United Slaves' (Brown, 2003, p. 2).

Although the two groups had been united previously under the Black congress, their conflict gradually increased as the Panthers felt that Karenga and US Organization were agents of the U.S government (Brown, 2003). The reason why Black Panthers displayed such views about Karenga and his organization is that Karenga would often meet with the LAPD to quell black revolts in Los Angeles. Such revolts that they attempted to quell were the Watts Riots of 1965. Karenga and US organized the Watts festival in efforts to sway people from retaliatory violence to organized community action (Brown, 2003). According to Elizabeth Pleck (2001), this festival was mocked by the Black Panthers when they referred to it as the darkey carnival or darkey parade (p. 10).

The hostility between US Organization and the Black Panthers reached a boiling point when two members of the Black Panther Party were gunned down by members of US Organization at the UCLA campus (Brown, 2003; Pleck, 2001).

It should be noted that these two groups were engaged in a fight for “dominance in the [black] public sphere – from community meetings and street corners to college campuses” (Brown, 2003, p. 88, brackets mine). This stemmed from each of them feeling like their own politics was more effective, each then wanted black/African people to follow one and not the other. This enmity between the two camps complicated their efforts to champion a liberatory politics for black/African peoples, because they engaged in deadly competition for an audience instead of unity in struggle. By doing so, they were defying an aspect that is at the center of the Pan-African call, black unity. Also, this feud was self-defeating to the black/African community, because it was creating chaos and destruction, which was surely contrary to promises of freedom and protection. Nevertheless, this feud between the two camps was not merely black failure at pursuing Pan-African goals, because “if not instigated by the F.B.I, then [it was] certainly fueled by them [and] led to permanent enmity between the two organizations” (O’Reilly, cited in Pleck, 2001, pp. 10-11, brackets mine). There is documentation on the F.B.I sending out fabricated letters to each of the two groups which relayed supposed plans by one group to assassinate members of the other group (Brown, 2003). Clearly, the F.B.I established a ploy for the Panthers and the US Organization members to kill each other. This was white America’s efforts to divide and conquer black/African people to stall black social action, which was a threat to systems of white dominance.

Besides white America’s designs to sever black unity, it can be argued that the Black Panthers’ accusations that Karenga was an F.B.I agent himself, were somewhat justified. I make this assertion because his politics was confounding in that he collaborated with the same, colonial, systems that oppressed black/African masses, while claiming to liberate the masses. The systems such as, the police and the governor, whom Karenga seemed to have close ties with, were structures of white power, hence, the symbols of black oppression. It has been found that, “suddenly in 1968 US had money to buy new vans and cars. Panthers were frequently stopped by Los Angeles and San Diego police for carrying weapons but the Panthers believed that the police did not stop gun-toting US members” (Pleck, 2001, p. 11). The luxuries cited may have been Karenga’s incentive for the information he provided the F.B.I and, yes, the US members were not troubled by the police perhaps because they were the eyes and ears of the police. Further, Elizabeth Pleck (2001) finds that, after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, Maulana Karenga secretly met with the Los Angeles governor, Ronald Reagan. Karenga claimed that the meeting was to discuss how to get his people out of prison, but this was dismissed by the Panthers as bluff. Upon failing to defend his meeting with Reagan, Karenga later expressed regret for the meeting (Brown, 2003). Now the question to ask Karenga is, how does one rub shoulders with the same systems that one seeks to liberate himself from? I guess this is the question that induced skepticism amongst the Panthers regarding Karenga’s politics and intentions. I would believe that in liberation politics, one does not dine (it seems that Maulana Karenga was dining with LAPD and the governor) with systems of oppression; instead, one should fiercely combat the systems of subjugation. I maintain this because José Martí said, “rights are to be taken, not requested; seized, not begged for” (cited in DK, 2013, p. 205). Thus, for Karenga to furtively meet with the forces of the colonial state was traitorous to the black struggle, and, yes, suspect.

### **11. Karenga as a Despot not Liberator.**

Another factor that complicates Maulana Karenga’s politics is that he had ambitions to lord over the black/African community. This desire is already exhibited in his name Maulana which means master teacher in KiSwahili (Andrews, 2016; Pleck, 2001). To call oneself “master teacher of tradition” was already problematic, because it places Karenga at the top of all other black/African peoples, since he stands out as the teacher; a figure of authority, which would mean that he possessed all the tools that the people needed to decolonize. This would render him the superior if not the only voice to listen to. My view here is supported by Kehinde Andrews (2019) who writes that Maulana Karenga was “the unquestioned head of the [US] organization” (p. 120, brackets mine). If Karenga was decolonial, he would have noted that decolonization does not entail an individual thinking for the people (as if some liberator), but rather thinking with the people, because, in the words of Che Guevara, “liberators do not exist, the people liberate themselves” (cited in DK, 2013, p. 313).

The reality of creating teachers or representatives of the black/African community already defeats decolonial efforts because it presents the same hierarchies that we see in oppressive systems, where those at the top oppress the masses at the bottom of the pyramid. To decolonize is not to establish hierarchies but to be totally de-hierarchical.

### 11.1 A Pan-African Culturalist with No African Culture

A further problematic aspect of Karenga's cultural nationalism is that, even though he presented himself to the people as the master teacher of black/African tradition, he had never travelled to Africa when he created such holidays as Kwanzaa in 1963 (Pleck, 2001, p. 6). One would have expected the "master teacher of tradition" to at least have visited Africa to acquire a first-hand experience of the cultures from the black/African peoples in the continent rather than imagining, or learning about these cultures through filtered or distorted knowledges in white colonial and racist universities. It is first-hand knowledge that gives one mastery and not imagination or thought. I maintain that it would have been more meaningful for Karenga to have visited Africa because his philosophy of *Nguzo Saba* was expressed in African languages, which meant African culture, since language is a carrier of culture (Fanon 1963; WaThiong'o 1986). *Nguzo Saba* were " *umoja* (unity),  *kujichagulia* (self-determination),  *ujima*, (collective work and responsibility),  *ujamaa* (cooperative economics),  *nia* (purpose),  *kuumba* (creativity), and  *imani* (faith)" (Brown, 2003, p. 140). It is noteworthy that Kwanzaa was a holiday celebration that occurred over the span of several days after Christmas (Andrews, 2019; Brown, 2003; Pleck, 2001). The holiday was created as a uniquely black/African holiday that would be more meaningful to the people than Christmas, which is primarily a European holiday (Pleck, 2001; Brown, 2003). Although "Kwanzaa is now very popular across the Diaspora, including in Britain, and is used as a tool to bring Black communities together" (Andrews, 2019, p. 109), not all black/African peoples celebrate it (Pleck, 2001). Maybe some black/African peoples do not celebrate the holiday because they feel like it stems from a fabricated culture or that it is the brainchild of a teacher of mythicized African tradition, Karenga.

### 12. US Organization: Cultists, Gangsters, and no Pan-Africanists.

The political approach displayed by Maulana Karenga has been criticized by some black/African thinkers because US Organization was more cult-like than nationalistic. It is believed that followers of the organization were not devoted to black liberation politics but to Karenga himself. Expounding this view, Kehinde Andrews (2019) had the following words to say:

The US Organization was not only a form of cultural nationalism, but an actual cult. This brand of cultural nationalism even included the kind of violence and control we would expect from a sect. Karenga was jailed from 1971 to 1974 for torturing and imprisoning a female US member because he believed she was a traitor. (p. 120)

In addition to the cult-like system of US, this organization presented itself as a gang; therefore, represented not black power politics but gangster tactics (yes, torturing and imprisoning people isn't nationalistic, Karenga, that's gangster!). This renders Maulana Karenga more of a gangster than a Pan-African revolutionary. My thoughts here can be further corroborated by the fact that Karenga was recruiting actual gang members from the streets of Los Angeles into US Organization. At times, the organization used coercive methods to persuade people to follow Karenga's teachings (Pleck, 2001). Additionally, the torturing of females that Andrews cites above was not only a result of Karenga's cult or gang-like organization, but also his sexist attitude towards women. He treated women as not creators of the revolution but reproducers for it (Andrews, 2019, p. 130). It has been said that the US Organization, especially in its early days, promoted a politics that excluded women. According to Komozi Woodard (1999) "Karenga insisted that the essence of femininity was submission" (p. 124). This attitude of Karenga's and US towards women was contrary to the Pan-African ideal, because they could never be freedom for black/African peoples without freedom for black women from oppressive patriarchal structures. When they demonstrated exclusivist and sexist views towards women, Karenga and US were cementing the same hierarchical and discriminatory systems of social oppression that subjugated the black/African masses.

### 13. Conclusion.

In this paper, I have been arguing that Pan-African thinkers displayed thoughts and actions that were complex and, at times, contrary to the Pan-African philosophy and politics. The three Pan-Africanists that I presented in this essay are Marcus Garvey, W.E.B DuBois, and Maulana Karenga. Marcus Garvey was Pan-African, but not decolonial as he advocated for Africa to be developed in Western standards. Also, it can be concluded that Garvey's Pan-Africanism constituted undertones of colonialism. W.E.B DuBois was a great thinker, but he might have been jealous of Garvey's success in connecting with the masses, which led him to attack or discredit Garvey's efforts. As a result, this severed their relations. It is true that the rift between W.E.B DuBois and Marcus Garvey led to a reality contrary to the Pan-African call of black unity. The same can be said of the animosity between Maulana Karenga and the Black Panther Party. Finally, Maulana Karenga's activism was confounding due to his association with the forces that oppressed black/African people. Equally perplexing was the cult-like and gangster operations of his US organization, and its sexism towards black women.

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> See editorial letter by Marcus Garvey, published on the UCLA African studies center website, under title American Series Sample Documents: Vol III: September 1920 – August 1921.

<sup>ii</sup> Although this article doesn't give an in-depth commentary on the Black Panthers' Pan-African politics, they are an organization with a great significance within Pan-Africanism. For a thorough discussion of the organization's contributions to Pan-African politics, see, for example, Austin. C. (2014). International Solidarity, Pan-Africanism, and the Black Panther Party.

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