

IN CONVERSATION WITH...

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CJAS: Dr Frehiwot, thank you for taking some time to talk to us about the All-African People's Conference, AAPC, that will be held at the Institute of African Studies in December, 2018. Can you tell us what the conference is about, who should attend and why?

MF: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the 60th Anniversary of the AAPC. The conference is commemorating the original AAPC held in 1958 in Accra, Ghana, to organize, strategize and unify the various liberation struggles in Global Africa. This conference will be hosted from the 5-8th of December, by the Institute of African Studies and several partners including the Trade Union Congress of Ghana, the Socialist Forum of Ghana and Lincoln University (Pennsylvania).

The theme for the commemoration, *Revisiting the 1958 All-African People's Conference - The Unfinished Business of Liberation and Transformation*, is designed to encourage the activist groups, scholars, cultural workers and practitioners who we expect will assemble in Accra, to engage in open and reflective discussion on the African condition in the contemporary world, against the backdrop of the 1958 conference.

A central feature of the commemoration will be (i) the coming together of social groups working at the forefront of the unfinished business of liberation, (ii) a conventional academic conference that permits scholars and activists to share insights from research and practice, and (iii) artistic performances that showcase the beauty, diversity and uniqueness of African cultures.

The discussions will revolve around the following sub-themes:

1. Neo-colonialism and Imperialism,
2. Pan-Africanism today,
3. The Peoples of Africa (including the Diaspora),
4. Emancipation of Women,
5. Global Warming, and
6. Reparation and Restorative Justice.

In addition to the academics who usually attend such conferences, we especially welcome participation from students, workers, women, activists, community members, artists and anyone interesting in the advancement of Pan-Africanism.

Individuals and groups can register using this link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfpMCkjo4JfpP_ZvORrcCJKw35uvANfPGWLLLPxDIb79AlcFg/viewform or by going to the Institute of African Studies website (<http://ias.ug.edu.gh>) and clicking on the AAPC banner.

CJAS: Why is the pan-African agenda still relevant today and how could it be operationalised?

MF: Pan-Africanism is basically about the total liberation of Africa, by its people, for its people, both at home and abroad. Clearly this is yet to be realized and as such Pan-Africanism as an idea and movement is both relevant today and is something that we should be embracing as African people all over the world.

The relevance of the Pan-African Movement is not just a question about the oppression and exploitation of African people by the West but is a question about the ability of African people to manage their own affairs. The question we should be asking is: How are African people now managing the evolution of their own states and their communities outside of Africa? What is the relationship between Africa and Africans in the Diaspora? How do African countries protect their people outside of Africa? Why are African people being unfairly prosecuted by the prison industrial complex in the United States, in Europe where Black men still find themselves targets by the justice system or find themselves economically and educationally disadvantaged in Latin America or cannot send their children to school in many countries in Africa? What is Africa doing to support these segments of the African world? Africa as a continent and most African countries seem to find themselves helpless in terms of defending African people in the Diaspora and even on the continent. This is because there is a lack of economic and political power at both the individual and the collective level.

The Pan-African movement is not a panacea that will immediately free all African people. It is also not a one-time event that will result in a liberated and unified Africa. It is a movement that is both protracted and proximate. The movement must take place at the local level, at the community level and at the national and international level. However, in order to operate at multiple levels at the same time, the movement must be grounded in an African centered ideology, one that promotes African agency. This ideology should be guided by three key pillars that could serve as the spring board for Pan-Africanism. The three pillars are: 1). African identity (politically) must be embraced and should supersede all local struggles for power based on ethnicity and/or religion. This includes the struggle between the African continent and the Diaspora and the struggle between race first Pan-Africanists and Continentalisms explored in Omotoso and Layode (2014).

CJAS: Can you briefly explain for us the difference between “race-first Africanists” and “Continentalists”, this seems to be a key question asked by the conference.

MF: Yes this is a great question!! The race-first Africanists do not acknowledge African people in North Africa as Africans and in some cases subscribe to the notion that the primary contradiction facing African people is based on race. This position is based on the fact that the Arab-Islamic Slave Trade negatively impacted North Africa and much of that part of the continent was colonized by people from Middle East countries. On the other had Continentalists promote the idea of a unified Africa including people in North Africa. While, they recognize the oppression and exploitation that occurred they recognize that North Africa is part of the continent and must be taken into consideration when promoting Pan-Africanism. It is also important to remember, as Campbell notes, that today there are plenty of North Africans that are Black Africans and some like Gamal Nassar promoted Pan-Africanism and worked directly with Kwame Nkrumah to push the Pan-African Agenda.

MF: Coming back to your question about the Pan-African agenda, 2). Pan-Africanism must be guided by the notion that leadership is not necessarily based on the orthodox view of who a leader is, for example, the Politician, Minister, Iman, Chief, Queen Mother, Professor, etc. Leadership must be defined as anyone who is willing to contribute to the Pan-African movement. This approach will ensure that the movement is not dominated by customary leaders but is comprised of those we don't typically view as leaders, such as market women and men, lorry drivers, teachers, unemployed workers, etc. 3). The movement must seek to dislodge Africa and African people from dependence on the West including loans, grants, trading, military support, infrastructure support, used clothes, etc. This is not to say that in a global world, Africa and African people will be isolated from it, but it is to acknowledge that the super-dependence that now exists does not support the independence of Africa or African people (Rodney, 1972).

CJAS: It seems to me that one of the most pressing question facing the Pan-African movement is how to operationalise it. Should we look towards regional bodies like ECOWAS or the African Union as the driving force to operationalise the movement?

MF: I would suggest that the movement must be operationalised at all levels of society, but the challenge is how do we then connect those levels? We must use existing structures like Unions to promote Pan-African ideology to press for Pan-

African policies at the state level. We must also create trans-continental bodies that promote intersectionality and exchange between the various segments of the African world. We must have a ground swell of Pan-African ideologically minded people who can push for systematic change politically and economically in their respective sectors. For example, all over Global Africa we have workers, market women and men, ministers, traditional leaders, students, women, the unemployed, the youth, etc. Can we not form organisations and unions to have cross-African connections and struggles to transform the conditions of African people? We also have to push the existing regional bodies to promote Pan-Africanism and to challenge the dominant notions of Africa's place in the world. This is a tall order, but it is one that must be taken and may be a long and protracted struggle.

CJAS: What do you think are the most pressing issues for the Continent and global Africa today?

MF: The most pressing issues for the continent and global Africa while multi-layered lead back to one glaring fact—Africa does not control her resources both human and material. Some may argue the point that Africa does control her human resources as African people are not enslaved nor do they suffer under the yoke of colonialism. But I would argue that when a people cannot meet their full potential as a result of brain drain, lack of adequate health care, education, employment, housing and human rights they do not control their human resources. Most African countries cannot afford to support their citizens with basic human rights, which ultimately stunts their ability to be part and parcel of the process to develop the nation and continent. I would suggest that one of major challenges or pressing issues that Global Africa faces today is the inability to actively engage the entire population in the development process. This ultimately results in massive under/un-employment, illiteracy, hunger and poverty, disease, brain drain, migration, lack of infrastructure, and much more.

Economically, Africa and Global Africa suffers from economies that are constructed around exporting raw materials and importing large quantities of everyday goods. Most African countries do not have the industrial technology to produce finished products, so they are forced to export raw materials based on the world market price point. In return these same countries import everything from rice to toothpicks to cars and clothes resulting in an uneven export/import economy.

Politically, Africa and Global Africa does not have the political clout to negotiate and advocate for African farmers, youth in Brazil or young African men and women in the US. This places Africa at a disadvantage and its scattered people on their own to defend themselves in lands that where they have little claim and fewer rights.

CJAS: Most African countries have been emancipated from colonial rule for at least 50 years. What would you say to someone who says, ‘Why do some scholars and activists still blame Europe for our problems today, isn’t it about time that Africa fixed her own problems? Isn’t our solution better leaders?’ Could we not argue that these are not questions of what we cannot afford, but what we prioritise and what we are willing to spend on. Some have said that African leaders are our worst enemies. For example, many African countries spends heavily on military planes, ammunition and other gadgets compared to what they spend on education and health.

MF: This is a great question as it is a true statement. It is time that we move beyond blaming our problems on Europe. It is, however, not out of place to accurately describe that Europe and America are financially and technologically “developed” as a result of Africa’s “underdevelopment”. It is also important to note that the legacy of the Trans-Atlantic and Arab-Islamic Slave Trades hindered the natural evolution of Africa and African people. Furthermore, we need to remind ourselves of certain facts that have global antecedents; every hour a woman is raped in the Congo, while, Coltan, that “treasure” found in smart phones and other computers, is being mined for next to nothing. I would be remiss if I did not mention that the Civil War in the Congo is good for business for Apple, HP, Samsung, Toshiba and any other company in need of this precious mineral. This is not to say that there are not African people who play a role in the exploitation, but it is to say that we must not forget that neo-colonialism, as Kwame Nkrumah rightfully outlined, is the stage in which Africa will be colonized through political and economic means.

Africa and African leaders do not have to go along with this narrative. Some leaders find that they are co-conspirators with the West and they promote the exploitation of African resources for their own personal gain. Other leaders try their best to manage a bad situation that is as impossible to navigate as if they were paddling upstream without a paddle.

I would, however, like to suggest that we have to re-evaluate our analysis of a leader and begin to push for change from the bottom up. We must find leaders in our local communities that can feed up through a pipeline to those representatives at the regional level, who can then feed up to the national level and then up the continental level. Part of our problem is not a question of good or bad leaders, but it is a challenge of leaders both at the top and bottom that are afraid to, as Thomas Sankara has said, “[D]are to invent the future”.

CJAS: Can you link the African condition to that in global Africa?

MF: In Global Africa, the most pressing issues are quite similar to those on the continent. The repressive nature of the state against African people in some

places in Latin America and in the US speaks directly to the struggles being faced in those communities. In addition, African people in places like Latin America, the Caribbean and North America are economically, politically and socially disenfranchised. They often have higher levels of non-communicable diseases, lack access to quality health care, live in food deserts, lack culturally and historically appropriate educational opportunities, have higher rates of unemployment and much more. This is both as a result of the capitalist economic system that promotes profit over people and the weak economic and political state of Africa.

Lastly, the most pressing issue facing Africa and her Diaspora is a lack of ideological clarity. Ideology reflects society and the ruling class and unfortunately the ruling classes, even in Africa, are promoting an ideology that embraces rampant individualism, free market and profit over people. We are all governed by ideology, but we must determine in Global Africa how do we shed ourselves of this seemingly exploitative ideology and replace it with a Pan-African ideology that can promote peace, unity, liberation and freedom.

CJAS: As an American citizen, how do you see the role of the US in foreign policy, especially in relation to the lives of black people globally?

MF: I am a US citizen, but I consider myself a daughter of Africa and identify as an African. My citizenship is as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and this is something that I must first acknowledge. Now that this point is out of the way, I think it is important to also note that as Walter Rodney states in “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa”, America and Europe are developed economically and politically because of Africa’s underdevelopment. This fact is important because as US foreign policy is negatively impacting Africa and African people we must understand that the US is strong as a result of the exploitation of Africa’s material and human resources. The US has had a long history of anti-African policies but in the last several years the overt policy and actions towards Africa has promoted a culture of oppression, exploitation and hate. A good example is the United States African Command (Africom) whose mission according to its website is, “Through multinational exercises and military to military engagements, U.S. Africa Command strengthens relationships with African partner nations to help build the defence capability and capacity of their security forces” (<https://www.africom.mil>). This may seem like a positive thing for Africa, but one must question is this relationship of shared military training and intelligence a two-way relationship? Can African countries go to the U.S. and train the military or open a military base on U.S. soil?

Beyond overt agencies like Africom, U.S. foreign policy towards Africa has recently been both antagonistic and focused on an anti-terrorism approach.

There has been an increase in military spending and programmes and a decrease in social service type funding such as that of USAID. Conversely, what is most glaring about US foreign policy towards Africa is actually the anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric that is engulfing most of the US. The notion that African/immigrant workers are somehow destroying America is sweeping the country like wildfire. This ideology results in excessive arrests and detention of African immigrants and eventual deportation for many people who have little to return to in their home country. There is little talk of the contributions that African immigrants have made and continue to make to the US. There is little talk of the taxes they pay but cannot access or the historic contributions the Diaspora (enslaved Africans and their descendants) made under duress. On this count alone, every African immigrant should be welcomed and should most certainly not be jailed, separated from their families and deported in shackles back to their home countries with only the clothes on their backs. However, this gives us an opportunity in Africa to promote the theory that staying in Africa to build Pan-Africanism is better than crossing the ocean or Sahara Desert to find a better life.

CJAS: Please tell us a little bit about yourself, what courses you teach, and your own research interests.

MF: I graduated with my PhD in African Studies from Howard University. My primary research focuses on Pan-Africanism and education, specifically the role of formal and informal education as a means of promoting Pan-African Consciousness. I also am involved in a project funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation titled, “Outside or Inside: the contributions of the African Diaspora to Ghanaian Cultural Life”, where I am investigating the impact of the African Diaspora in Ghana on Ghanaian culture. This research focuses on four main institutions including Black Baptist Churches in the U.S. and Christian Charismatic Churches in Ghana; formal and informal educational institutions such as independent African schools; individuals who work at places like the University of Ghana; and musical genre such as jazz, hip hop, and reggae. The research is using Afrocentricity as the primary theory which promotes African agency and is grounded in the notion that there is cross fertilization of cultures between the African Diaspora and Ghanaian cultural life. I am also working on a project that focuses on Pan-African political thought and interrogates the African Philosophy of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania.

I am a member of the History and Politics Section of the Institute of African Studies and I teach at the Master’s level politics courses on Post-Colonial African Governments, History of Pan-Africanism and at the Phd level-Pan-Africanism and African Unity and State and Politics in Africa. I am also part of the teaching team for the University of Ghana’s required undergraduate course

Introduction to African Studies where I handle the Africa in the Contemporary World course with my colleague Dr. Richard Asante.

CJAS: You moved to Ghana from the US in 2015 to join the IAS faculty, how has that journey been like for you?

MF: Thank you for the question and yes, I relocated to Ghana from the US in 2015 to join the faculty at IAS and my experience has been both enlightening and interesting. Some Diasporan Africans repatriate to Africa in general and Ghana in particular for personal and political reasons. I too chose to move back home for both personal and political reasons. I realised that as an activist academic, and a Pan-Africanist, I should make my contribution to the Pan-African Movement in Ghana on the University campus. This is both a political and personal decision—politically I decided that Pan-Africanism is the correct solution for Africa and African people and that Africa is the center of that struggle. And personally, I realised that to strive in the academy I needed to make the move to Ghana to do so. The journey has been overwhelmingly positive in that I am still excited that I made the journey and it has helped me grow in ways that I would not have been able to grow if I had secured an academic position in the US. The support of my colleagues at IAS has helped me to settle into the culture at UG and IAS and they have also challenged me to move beyond my own analysis of Pan-Africanism. For example, my colleagues Drs. Kojo Aidoo and Edem Adotey are studying Pan-Africanism at the borders and among local communities that do not recognize colonial borders. Another example is my senior colleague and mentor Professor Esi Sutherland-Addy whose very existence is a story of Pan-Africanism and her work here at IAS or through her many political and community projects has greatly influenced the Pan-African movement.

The journey has certainly not been all a bed of roses as transition from one location, be it within a country or across continents comes with its own struggles. But my analysis of change is dialectical, and I recognized that the change would require my willingness to be humble and patient and to reach out to others for help. In this vein I have to mention that my colleagues again have supported this transition especially my good friend and colleague Dr. Irene Appeaning Addo and of course I would be remiss if I did not mention the support of my mentor Professor Akosua Adomako Ampofo, who is trailblazing the way for Pan-African women.

CJAS: What advice would you give to a young African in an African university today about her or his future, especially some who are jaded and feeling cynical about the continent's future?

MF: Wow, this is a very difficult question to answer as the future of Africa is

dependent on the youth of Africa, but some of these very youth are running from Africa. I would suggest that the youth of Africa and the Diaspora must recognize five things about their future and contributions to Africa:

The future of Africa is dependent on their contributions to improve the conditions of Global Africa

Businessmen and women from Japan to China to the U.S, see a future in Africa. They are participating in infrastructure projects, exporting raw resources including oil and coltan, and setting up small and large businesses to address the needs of their ever-growing populations. There must be something special about Africa that everyone can clearly identify. This means that we must stay in Africa and contribute to developing Africa so that we too can take charge of infrastructure projects and we can process our raw materials into sellable goods. We will only be able to do this if we each individually decide that we will break the cycle of dependence on outside entities to build Africa.

We often blame all of the continents problems on the West or elected officials in various governments. We rarely recognise the role that everyday Africans play in the plight of Africa today. What is our role in reinforcing corruption and nepotism in Africa? Do we stand against local corruption or do we use it when it benefits us personally? Do we stand against the oppression of women in Africa or do we stay quiet when we see women being exploited? The youth must stand up against injustice everywhere they see it from the classroom to the market to their own family. We often think that the problem is too large for us to stand against, but it only takes one to stand against injustice.

All revolutionary movements and liberation struggles in the history of Africa have been led by the youth. How can we expect to have a Pan-African movement when we have our youth running from Africa to get a “better” education in America or in Europe? We must also recognise that all youth need not be part and parcel of a revolutionary movement to make a difference. Just by taking a job in Africa as a teacher or a doctor or by starting a business you are participating in an act that will promote Pan-Africanism.

Finally, if not African youth then who will stand up for Africa? If not now, when will African youth stand up for Africa?

CJAS: Thank you very much, it has been a pleasure talking to you.

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Dr. Mjiba Frehiwot is a research fellow in the History and Politics Section of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. Her research focuses on Pan-Africanism and education in the era of Kwame Nkrumah and the African Diaspora. She holds a Master of Social Work and Bachelor of Social Work. She is both an academic and an activist in the Pan-African Movement. Dr. Frehiwot has been organizing in Pan-African local and international organisations for twenty-two years, starting as a student organiser at San Jose State University. She is a member of the African Studies Association Africa and was a member of the organizing committee of the 2nd Biennial Kwame Nkrumah Intellectual and Cultural Festival and is the Chair of the Conference Secretariat of the 60th Anniversary of the All-African People's Conference.