

Revisiting The 1958 All-African People's Conference: The Unfinished Business Of Liberation And Transformation

Dzodzi Tsikata, Mjiba Frehiwot & Edem Adotey

Abstract

The 60th anniversary of the 1958 All-African People's Conference was commemorated globally by Pan-Africanists in 2018. The Institute of African Studies in collaboration with Lincoln University, the Socialist Movement of Ghana (Formerly Socialist Forum of Ghana), Third World Network-Africa and

Dzodzi Tsikata (dt48@soas.ac.uk) is a Distinguished Research Professor of Development Studies at SOAS, University of London. Before this, she was Professor of Development Sociology and is the immediate past Director of the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana. Her research in the last 30 years has been in the areas of gender and development policies and practices; agrarian change and rural livelihoods; the labour relations of the informal economy and transformative social policy. Her recent publications are the co-edited (with Elisabeth Prügl and Fenneke Reysoo) Forum in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* on the theme “Commercializing Agriculture/Reorganizing Gender” (JPS 48,7, September 2021). She is also the Principal Investigator of a pan-African research, networking and advocacy project, the Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy for Post-COVID-19 Africa (GETSPA) which is examining the social policy trajectories of thirty-one African countries. She is the secretary of the executive committee of IDEAS and a member of the Agrarian South Network and a member of the editorial collectives of *Feminist Africa* and *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*.

Mjiba Frehiwo (mfrehiwot@ug.edu.gh) is a Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. She is in the History and Politics Section of the Institute. Dr. Frehiwot researches, debates and thinks deeply about Pan-African consciousness and how to decolonize and re-Africanize knowledge production in Global Africa. Her primary research focuses on Pan-Africanism, African political thought, and social movements in Global Africa with a focus on Ghana, Tanzania and the United States. Dr. Frehiwot is engaged with several funded projects that centre questions of decolonization, African Agency and Pan-Africanism. She recently released her first film titled “Umoja: Africa Must Unite Now”. She is an associate editor with *Feminist Africa* and is the Treasurer of the African Studies Association of Africa. Most recently, she co-edited with Dr. Cheikh Thiam an issue of *Global Africa* titled, Pan-Africanism, African research and global issues (Number 03.2023-ISSN 3020-0458).

Edem Adotey (eadotey@ug.edu.gh) is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. He is a historian, and his primary research lies in African borderlands, particularly the intersection between the international borders and chieftaincy, electoral politics, nationalism, citizenship, and Pan-Africanism.

the Trade Union Congress (TUC) of Ghana hosted a global celebration of the anniversary from the 5th to 8th of December, 2018 at the University of Ghana. This special issue, which presents six feature articles written in connection with the 60th-anniversary celebration, is another instalment of the Institute's efforts to commemorate an epochal event in the history of the emancipatory struggles of the African people. The feature articles focus on some of the key themes of the conference: decolonising knowledge production; a new politics for substantive democracy and security; economic liberalisation and the crises of work; and Pan-Africanism yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Keywords: AAPC, Pan-Africanism, IAS, African Unity

Introduction

Ghana, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party, hosted the first All-African People's Conference (AAPC) from the 8th to 13th of December, 1958, in Accra. The conference which brought together over four hundred participants from the continent, diaspora, and Global South represented a shift for the Pan-African movement. Not only was it the first major Pan-African conference held on African soil, but it was hosted by Ghana, the first country south of the Sahara to attain independence. This inspired many nationalist leaders to rededicate their commitment to the liberation of their countries. Delegates at this conference included leaders of nationalist movements, labour unions, and youth organisations who were instrumental in the independence of their countries.

The 60th anniversary of the AAPC was commemorated globally by the Pan-Africanist movement in 2018. The Institute of African Studies in collaboration with Lincoln University, the Socialist Movement of Ghana (Formerly Socialist Forum of Ghana), Third World Network-Africa and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) of Ghana hosted a global celebration of the 60th anniversary from the 5th to 8th of December, 2018 at the University of Ghana. This special issue, which presents feature articles connected with the 60th anniversary celebration is another instalment of the Institute's efforts to commemorate an epochal event in the history of the emancipatory struggles of the African people.

The four-day international conference was attended by more than four hundred participants: students, workers, academics and civil society actors. The

event consisted of plenary and panel presentations and a substantial cultural programme of film shows, a photo exhibition, social gatherings, and a concert. In keeping with the ethos of the 1958 conference, this event was organised by an energetic group of younger scholars, supported by more established Pan-African activists. Particularly remarkable was the participation of students from the West Africa Region: Ghana, Burkina Faso, Togo, and Nigeria, who travelled by road. In contrast with the 1958 conference, there was a significant contingent of women, both in the leadership of the conference and among the participants. The conference honoured the participation of the youth and women by designating the first day of the conference as Youth and Women's Day. Dzodzi Tsikata, chair of the Conference Organising Committee, in her opening address, recalled past and current struggles for African liberation led by the youth and women, two demographics with the greatest stakes in liberation, and charged the conference to recognise the centrality of these struggles.

The conference re-examined the vision of the founding mothers and fathers of modern African states and the Pan-Africanist movement that gathered in Accra in 1958 to discuss the liberation of Africa from colonial rule and the transformation of the entire continent into a truly liberated space. As the theme of the 60th-anniversary commemoration – “The Unfinished Business of Liberation and Transformation” – suggests, the needed transformation and liberation have not materialised beyond political independence from the colonialists. The conference, therefore, explored this from multiple perspectives and proposed an “issues and recommendations statement” that offers a way forward.

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The Feature Articles

The conference tackled the question of decolonising knowledge in several sessions. The closing speech of Akilagpa Sawyerr, who chaired the conference, remarked on the bank of brilliant ideas and perspectives that emerged over the course of the event, and the palpable commitment of participants to what could become a new agenda for true liberation and transformation of the continent.

In this connection, he highlighted the need to grapple *at the level of theory* with the persistence of *neo-colonialism*. Given the co-optation of Africa's ruling classes by imperialism, he challenged participants to continue to examine what mobilisation and organisation, and ideological clarification would be necessary to identify and activate the real leaders of Africa's emancipation.

The first two feature articles speak to this theme. The first, *Pan-African Epistemologies of Knowledge Production: A Deconstruction-Based Critical Reflection* by James Dzisah & Michael Kpessa Whyte examines the epistemology of knowledge production in Africa. It argues that for knowledge to be emancipatory and liberatory, it must be rooted in African-centred knowledge and led by African people. It contends that authentic Pan-African epistemologies are possible, however, they must be situated within the broader architecture, structures, and processes of knowledge production that keep African culture and values alive. Similarly, Msia Kibona Clark's article, *Decolonising African Studies through a Hip-Hop Studies Lens*, explores the use of hip-hop studies approach to offer additional frameworks for research in African Studies. The first approach involves challenging the hierarchies that exist between researchers and community members, as well as the inclusion of community members as participants in the design and implementation of the research agenda. The second approach includes the challenges to the citational politics that marginalise the works of Black scholars and practitioners.

The politics of Africa's liberation was front and centre of the conference. The opening keynote speech by Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Revisiting the 1958 All-African People's Conference* historicised Africa's liberation from colonialism to neo-colonialism, illustrated by the challenges of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the tragic story of Patrice Lumumba. The closing speech by Horace Campbell focused on the key issues facing Global Africa today including health and liberation, the importance of the Congo, the crisis of capitalism and strengthening Pan-African understanding. Three of the feature articles take up this theme. D. Zizwe Poe's article, *Ghana: A 20th Century Example of a Pan-African Liberated Zone*, interrogates the role that Ghana played as Pan-African Liberated Zone (PALZ) during the period that Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party were in power. The paper further examines the PALZ in operation while Sékou Touré and Kwame Nkrumah were co-presidents in Guinea. Edem Adotey's article, *Transnational Citizenship on the Borderlands: Towards Making (Non)Sense of National Borders in Africa*, challenges the notion that abolishing boundaries means erasing the physical

boundaries. The article argues that abolishing the boundaries means abolishing outdated notions of national sovereignty and citizenship attached to them by post-independence African governments. Mjiba Frehiwot's article, *Looking Backwards to Run Forward: A Critical Examination of the 60th Anniversary of the 1958 All-African People's Conference*, examines the similarities, differences, and levels of progression between the 1958 AAPC and the 2018 60th anniversary of the AAPC. It analyses the objectives and representation of the conferences, resolutions, and critical issues raised at each meeting. The article provides a detailed summary of the way forward for the Pan-African movement using the 2018 AAPC issues and recommendations as the baseline.

The sixth feature article by Adryan Wallace, *Generating Inclusive and Sustainable Growth: Challenging Neoliberal Approaches to Gender Mainstreaming in Regional Economic Integration in Africa*, focuses on a topical issue, the pathways to Africa's economic integration in Africa. The article argues that the introduction of The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) is a critical attempt to attain regional economic integration and to generate inclusive and sustainable growth, and gender equality. However, regional integration is unlikely to attain these aims if it is based on the same neoliberal logics responsible for the existing global inequities and domestic, sub-regional, and regional inequalities. The article's focus resonates with several presentations made during the conference, and a keynote speech delivered by Anthony Yaw Baah, Secretary General of Trades Union Congress of Ghana, titled *A Brief History of Development Initiatives in Africa*, on day two. Designated as Workers' Day, this segment of the conference focused on Africa's economies and their deficits in relation to delivering decent work and dignified lives to the working people. Baah noted that there have been two types of development initiatives in Africa: initiatives by Africans and initiatives for Africa. The Africa-owned initiatives, which unfortunately were possible for less than a decade from independence, were people-centred and yielded some fruits in terms of human development. Those initiatives imposed on Africa on the other hand, particularly since the 1980s, have been based on the "blind" and ruthless free market ideology and have failed to achieve any significant improvement in human development on the continent. The failure is evidenced by the high incidence of poverty on the African continent after half a century of independence. Wallace's paper demonstrates that even African-owned initiatives can fall short of African aspirations of economic self-determination.

Conclusion

The 1958 All-African People's Conference inspired the anti-colonial struggle and heralded the independence of many African countries under colonial rule. 60 years on, despite the attainment of political independence, it is clear the dream of true liberation is yet to be realised. This special issue addresses the contemporary challenges facing Africa and its diasporas, highlighting the unfinished tasks set out at the first All-African People's Conference. Through a critique of earlier approaches, the contributors to the special issue provide insights into Africa's challenges and propose alternative political, economic, social, and cultural perspectives on the total liberation of Africa and her people.