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Narrowing the Gap: Between the African-centered and Postmodernist Interpretations of Pan-Africanism in Contemporary Black-Atlantic Studies

By Babacar M'Baye

African-centered and postmodern critics of Black culture tend to either accentuate or weaken the search for common identities, roots, and resistance between people of African descent, failing to identify and discuss similarities and differences in how Blacks on both sides of the Atlantic have continually struggled against either racism or colonialism. While African-centered scholars such as J. Ayodele Langley, Sterling Stuckey, and Molefi Kete Asante have defined the concept of pan-Africanism in terms that stress unity between Black people, postmodernist critics such as Stuart Hall, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Gerald Early have characterized it in terms that emphasize disconnections between them. Unlike their African-centered counterparts, postmodernist scholars of Black culture tend to focus on discontinuities, ambivalences and contradictions in the relations between the Black Diaspora and Africa. As a result, postmodernists have dangerously minimized the importance of shared cultures, origins, and conditions that are so essential in the development and understanding of the struggle of Blacks worldwide against oppression. The opposition between the two different schools of thought on the nature of Black struggle and on what Sterling Stuckey once called "what constituted being of the African family" has created major gaps in the study of pan-Africanism within the discipline of Black-Atlantic Studies.[1] These gaps need to be addressed and narrowed with a balanced and constructive approach to the study of the relations between people of African descent.

While the list of scholars who have mentioned pan-Africanism is very long, that of critics who have accurately defined the term is very short. A tentative definition of the term "pan-Africanism" is that which Molefi Kete Asante and Abu S. Abarry provide in *African Intellectual Heritage*. According to these scholars, the word "pan-Africanism" describes the spirit of solidarity that emerged during the First World War, when a group of Black intellectuals from the Caribbean, the Americas, and Africa met in London to discuss the future of Blacks worldwide.[2] In this sense, pan-Africanism is the study of

[1] Sterling Stuckey, Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 201.

[2] Molefi Kete Asante and Abu S. Abarry, *African Intellectual Heritage* (Philadelphia:

the history of the idea of unity among people of African descent that has been manifest in the works of Black intellectuals from different regions. It is important to note that these intellectuals were also of different generations and genders.

In his 1969 essay, "Pan-Africanism," Imanuel Geiss argued that pan-Africanism has been "one of the least known political movements or concepts of our time" because the term is still "vague," its history is "complicated and little explored," and "most writers have been more or less content with the short account by W.E.B. Du Bois and the more detailed work by George Padmore."[3] Though his list of pioneer pan-Africanists is narrow and focuses mainly on Du Bois, Padmore, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nkrumah, and Senghor, Geiss's study of pan-Africanism is crucial because its "provisional definition" of the concept which, as he indicated, though being "unsatisfactory," "will serve as a working tool for historical analysis, if used with caution."[4] In his book *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe and Africa*, Geiss defined pan-Africanism as a word that has both a narrower and a broader meaning. The narrower definition is limited to the political movements for the unification of the African continent, including the pan-Negro movement, while the broader definition includes the cultural and intellectual movements, such as anti-colonialism or Afro-Asianism, which aimed at wider solidarity.[5] The pan-Negro movement was an ideology formulated in the 1920s in which "Du Bois considered Africa and the emancipation of the Negro race as a function of the efforts of Afro-Americans to improve their own position in the USA."[6] Geiss's conception of pan-Africanism is clear when he highlights the major goals of its proponents. According to Geiss, pan-Africanists wanted to "claim full equality for Africans and Afro-Americans in the modern world," to "prove Africa's right to independence and the possibility of its rapid development through the introduction of modern techniques" and to "find some synthesis between the needs of modernization and the preservation of African society and culture," making pan-Africanism be thus a "largely African nationalism projected on the continental level and strengthened by the support of Afro-Americans in the New World."[7]

Geiss's assertions ignore the fact that the pan-Africanist movement was

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Temple Univ. Press, 1996), 444.

[3] Imanuel Geiss, "Pan-Africanism," in "Colonialism and Decolonization," special issue, *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 1 (January 1969): 187.

[4] Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa* (1968; New York: Africana, 1974), 4.

[5] Ibid., 7.

[6] Ibid., 173-174.

[7] Geiss, "Pan-Africanism," 189-190.

broad, transnational, and included Blacks from the Caribbean, South America, Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world. This oversight proves the necessity to do more research on pan-Africanism. Although it reflects the importance of unity among people of African descent, Geiss's theory is problematic, since it gives the impression that Africa is not part of the "modern world" because it is not technologically advanced. Geiss conceives of modernity from the outside in rather than from the inside out, as if Africa is not "modern" on its own terms. Geiss's reasoning is also flawed by its representation of Africa as the only poor region of the world, ignoring the fact that the Diaspora itself is riddled with almost the same structural, social, political, and economic problems that plague Africa. Both Africa and the Diaspora have ghettos.

Before going further, it is important to address the myth that the pan-African movement began either in the late eighteenth century or in 1900. For example, Geiss argues that the prehistory of pan-Africanism "in the narrower sense begins with the Pan-African conference in London in 1900; that the broader sense goes back to the late eighteenth century" and added that "prior to 1900 there was no Pan-Africanism in the narrower sense, either in name or form."[8] In *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900-1945* (1973), J. Ayodele Langley provided a theory similar to Geiss's when he said that prior to 1900, pan-Africanism in the Diaspora "remained merely an 'informal organization of memories' among articulate members of the Black Diaspora" who used it in churches and in other organizations in order "to affirm positively their 'Africanity' or to reject it."[9] Beside the either/or binary it reinforces, Langley's thesis minimizes the pan-Africanism which developed in the Diaspora from the fifteenth century to 1900. Creating a dichotomy between "formal" and "informal" types of pan-Africanism is unnecessary because the lines that distinguish pan-Africanists from one another are in constant flux, since Black intellectuals imagine Africa and unity in different ways that refuse such easy categorization. Besides, chronologically, pan-Africanism has existed in the Diaspora since the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade and is very noticeable in the Black literature from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century.[10]

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[8] Geiss, *Pan-African Movement*, 8.

[9] J. Ayodele Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900-1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 18.

[10] "Pan-Africanism became inevitable with the inception of the transatlantic slave trade. Europe, by scattering Africa to the winds, inevitably if unwittingly set in motion the process which would bring scattered Africa together again, at a higher level. It was inevitable that the forcibly uprooted Africans would yearn to rediscover their homeland. It was inevitable that the journey to rediscover would be a journey against the colonialism that had uprooted Africa in the first place. It was inevitable

One major study of pan-Africanism in the eighteenth century is Sterling Stuckey's *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*, where the author theorizes pan-Africanism as a struggle for the liberation of people of African descent. According to Stuckey, the pan-African struggle in the Diaspora began between 1800 and 1807 when pan-African consciousness was being formed in the culture of the African slaves in Americas.[11] Slaves in South Carolina and in the West Indies, "who had experienced the middle passage and had retained memories of the complexities of African culture," were able to draw from sets of shared experienced and cultures that influenced their political visions, religious outlook, and resistance against slavery.[12] One of the examples Stuckey gives is the ceremony of "election day" in eighteenth-century New England in which slaves chose a king who "carried himself as ruler and treated his [Black] followers like subjects" and "controlled [their affairs] on behalf of others."[13] For Stuckey, the behavior of the Black ruler and subjects during the parades of kings and governors in eighteenth-century New England suggests "the existence of elements of a pan-African culture in New World slavery" especially since "substantial numbers of slaves in Cuba and North America came from essentially the same areas of Africa, from the undulating stretch of land along the Guinea coast that, curving through Angola, helped give the world the ring shout. Related to the question of origins is the fact that, in the New World, Africans evolved along parallel lines in their cultural forms."[14] Stuckey's arguments suggest the strong and pervasive impact of African culture on the cultures that the enslaved Africans invented in the Diaspora. Stuckey's theories provide a historical model of a study of African influences on the Diaspora that I shall use to interpret historical and literary writings from both the Diaspora and Africa.

Another theorizing of pan-Africanism is an atypical postmodernist approach that tends to stress both continuities and discontinuities in the relations between Africa and the Diaspora. One example is Iris Schmeisser's essay, "Vive L'Union de tous les Noirs, et Vive l'Afrique: Paris and the Black Diaspora in the Interwar Years," where the author uses the term "pan-

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that a final reunification of scattered Africa could come only at the expense of colonial Europe. Thus was set in motion, by the transatlantic slave trade, a process whose course, even now, had not yet fully run." Tony Martin, *The Pan-African Connection: From Slavery to Garvey and Beyond* (Dover, MA: Majority Press, 1983), vii.

[11] Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 44.

[12] Ibid., 44.

[13] Ibid., 79.

[14] Ibid., 79-80.

Africanism" in a "critical, *metaphorical* sense to demonstrate how it is related to a modern and modernist diasporic cultural consciousness among artists, intellectuals and activists of African descent who traveled to or resided in Paris in the interwar years."[15] Schmeisser argued that her usage of the category "pan-African" as a cultural strategy "is a variation of Stuart Hall's dialogic notion of cultural identity and diaspora that encompasses both continuities as well as discontinuities, similarities and differences, concerning how Africa is conceptualized in the expressive culture and aesthetic practices of Black diasporic peoples."[16] Seeking a rational and positive representation of the meaning of pan-African resistance, Schmeisser contended, on the one hand, that the Africa which is "a colonial construct in the first place, was a product of the cultural dilemma" DuBois' notions of double-consciousness and the color line explored, which could be referred to as the "ambivalent interpretability of Black cultural data."[17] However, as Schmeisser pointed out, "this idea of Africa had a material reality," which was "the racist oppression and exploitation of African peoples by the Western colonizer that required a political solution and strategy of resistance based on the collaboration and solidarity of peoples of African descent."[18]

Schmeisser's concept of pan-Africanism regains the essence of pan-Africanism that has been lost due to the postmodernists's overemphasis on the racial essentialism of pan-Africanist intellectuals such as Du Bois or Garvey. In *In My Father's House*, Appiah said, "the pan-Africanists responded to their experiences of racial discrimination by accepting the racialism it presupposed."[19] Appiah also said, "though race is indeed at the heart of the pan-Africanist's nationalism, however, it seems that it is the fact of a shared race, not the fact of a shared racial character, that provides the basis for solidarity. Where racism is implicated in the basis for national solidarity, it is intrinsic, not extrinsic."[20] Appiah's theory about pan-Africanists recoups with the postmodernist interpretations of Black identity of Gilroy, which prioritize ideological disassociation of the Diaspora from Africa. Racial essentialism has had practical utilities in the development of Black resistance in the Diaspora since, as Schmeisser wrote, "the historical significance of 'race,'

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[15] Iris Schmeisser, "Vive l'union de tous les Noirs, et vive l'Afrique: Paris and the Black Diaspora in the Interwar Years," *Source: Revue d'études anglophones* 17 (Autumn 2004), http://www.paradigme.com (accessed June 14, 2005).
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 17.
[20] Ibid., 20.

racial essentialism and racism and how the cultural significance of 'race' was explained or expressed, were defining elements in the aesthetic debates of the New Negro movement during the interwar years."[21] Schmeisser's quotation opposes the postmodernist representation of pan-Africanists as mere racial essentialism by suggesting how Black intellectuals invoked racial purity to further their cultural and political resistance.

Unfortunately, a growing number of critics have become "bashers" of pan-Africanism. For example, Tamba E. M'Bayo wrote, "pan-Africanism sought to unite all people of African descent and thereby demonstrate the mutual bond believed to exist among Blacks regardless of geographic location. In reality, African American and Afro-Caribbean pan-Africanists often adopted contradictory positions that belied their universalist pan-Africanist aspirations. Indeed, despite its rhetoric and noble ideals, inconsistencies between pan-African theory and practice have been integral parts of the movement's long and checkered history."[22] M'Bayo's statement reinforces the pessimism Appiah expressed earlier about pan-Africanists's devotion to the idea of global African unity and freedom. In order to overcome this pessimism, it is imperative to examine the inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambivalences in pan-Africanist writings without undermining the symbolic and practical significance of racial and cultural solidarity that permeate them. In doing so, we will appreciate the humanity and respect for people of African descent that pan-Africanists showed amidst the ambiguous trajectories of their lives and work. By valuing, rather than denigrating pan-Africanism, we will arrive at a balanced and constructive study of its significance in the theorizing of both the traditional and modern conditions of Black people.

In his essay, "A Blacker Shade of Yale: African-American Studies Take A New Direction" Christopher Shea contrasted what he called "the academic cutting-edge" approach of the African-American Studies Program in Yale University with what he described as the "Afrocentric approach of 'voodoo methodology'" of Temple University.[23] This statement reflects the deep schism between African-centrists and postmodernist scholars who mislabel each other's approach, failing to recognize the similarities between their ideologies. Although their political and cultural approaches to Black struggle and freedom differ, scholars of the two schools aim at the collective goal of Black liberation. While it is important to illuminate the scholars' different approaches, it is vital to identify the axis where their theoretical

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[21] Schmeisser, "Vive l'union," 117.

[22] Tamba E. M'Bayo, "W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Pan-Africanism in Liberia, 1919-1924," *The Historian* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 19.

[23] Christopher Shea, "A Blacker Shade of Yale: African-American Studies Take a New Direction," *Lingua Franca* 11, no. 2 (March 2001): 44.

premises converge. This method will help us transcend the ongoing binary oppositions between the two schools of thought and center their paradigms in order to understand the transnational, political and cultural fights of Blacks for independence and equality.

Bridging the gap between African-centered and postmodernist interpretations of Black struggle is not an easy task, because there are continuous attacks on Afrocentric concepts of history and culture. Some postmodernists accuse Afrocentrists for overriding the local specificity of Black identity in favor of a transcending Blackness that all people of African descent could supposedly use to define their position in the modern world. One attack on Afrocentrism is Gerald Early's argument in his essay "Why Blacks Dream of a World without Whites." Afrocentricity "is meant to be an ideological glue to bring black people together, not just on the basis of color but as the expression of a cultural and spiritual will that crosses class and geographical lines"[24] Early misrepresents Afrocentrism by failing to interpret its conceptions of cultural and spiritual continuities outside the theoretical framework of essentialism. Afrocentrism is, first and foremost, a movement grounded on actual social and political realities such as the ongoing exploitation and objectification of Black people across the globe. Experienced in transatlantic slavery, European colonization and neo-colonization of African lands, this exploitation has not only led to the displacement of millions of Africans, but also to the formation of planter-bourgeois classes across Western Europe, North and South America, and the Caribbean, where Blacks have been exploited for centuries on the basis of their race.

When one accepts that slavery and colonization were historical facts that displaced human and economic resources from Africa to the Western world, one must agree that Afrocentric theories that stress a continuum between the past and present conditions of Blacks are legitimate counter-attacks to Western hegemony. As Asante argued in his electronic essay, "The Ideology of Racial Hierarchy and the Construction of the European Slave Trade," "the enslavement of Africans must be seen in a larger context of European domination where nothing was to prevent the use of collective violence, enslavement, against Africans in order for Europe to carry out its aims."[25] In this sense, Afrocentrism is postmodern in its approach, since it requires that critics displace the Western narrative of conquest and victory and interpret

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[24] Gerald Early, "Why Blacks Dream of a World without Whites," in *Border Texts: Cultural Readings for Contemporary Writers*, ed. Randall Bass (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 621.

[25] Molefi Kete Asante, "The Ideology of Racial Hierarchy and the Construction of the European Slave Trade," conference paper given December 9-12, 1998, in Lisbon, Portugal, http://www.asante.net/articles/ideo-rac.html (accessed May 11, 2006).

it according to the moral, physical, and psychological violence that it has done to people of African descent. Like postmodernism, Afrocentrism seeks to denaturalize the Eurocentric historical narrative that accounts for how capitalism, humanism, and patriarchy were formed without acknowledging the price that Africans (men, women, and children) paid for such developments.[26] From this perspective, Afrocentrism becomes a theory that calls for racial and social justice through reparations for slavery and its consequences on the Black world. The notion of violence needs to be displaced from its normalized locus that reinforces traditional Western materialism and be re-centered and interpreted in the continuity of discrimination, exploitation, and alienation of Black people. Such a relocation of violence in modern contexts requires analysis of the traumatic effects of a brutal past and racism on Black people, which is what Afrocentric scholars do persistently against all odds.

With *In My Father's House*, Appiah rightly refuted a definition of pan-Africanism that overlooks the diversity of African communities and local customs. Appiah believes that "pan-Africanism, Black solidarity, can be an important force with real political benefits."[27] Yet he is unwilling to espouse the ideology because, he said, "it [pan-Africanism] doesn't work without its attendant mystifications."[28] Appiah continued, "the problem, of course, is that group identity seems to work only — or, at least, to work best — when it is seen by its members, as 'real.'"[29] Appiah's arguments are grounded on the Eurocentric notion that pan-Africanism is a myth and not a legitimate political and cultural outcry against the global Western oppression of Blacks. Appiah's criticism against pan-Africanism is based on the false notion that the ideology is racism and not its consequence. Using a very elitist outlook on Black struggle, Appiah considers himself as one of the few and privileged Black intellectuals of the West who are gifted enough to be able to distinguish between good and bad pan-Africanism. He wrote, "pan-African solidarity can be appropriated by those of us whose positions as intellectuals — as searchers after truth — make it impossible for us to live through the falsehoods of race and tribe and nation, whose understanding of history makes us skeptical that nationalism and racial solidarity can do the good that they can do without the attendant evils of racism — and other particularisms; without the warring of nations."[30] Appiah's declaration minimizes the intelligence and power of the adherents of pan-Africanism who reject the Euro-centered idea that

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[26] Irena R. Makaryk, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1993), 612.

[27] Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 175

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

racial Black solidarity and nationhood are myths, when White racial unity and Western nationalism have persisted and determine current global relations. Equating Black solidarity with racism is wrong, because it downplays the legitimacy of Black people's bonding from experiences of shared oppression and denigrates their ability to fight injustice along color lines. In "Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression," Tommie Shelby admitted that "as an emancipatory solidarity group, Blacks must be committed to social equality and respect for group differences, which means rooting racism wherever it exists, even within our own ranks."[31] Yet, as Shelby pointed out, "it is important to see that an oppression-centered black solidarity is not a matter of being anti-White, or even pro-Black, but of being anti-racist. Consequently, solidarity with other racially oppressed groups, and even with committed anti-racist Whites, is not precluded by it."[32] Shelby's statement shows that Black solidarity is conducive to anti-racism, since it does not negate cross-racial or cross-class unity against oppression.

Appiah's views on Black unity resemble those of Stuart Hall, where racial solidarity built along racial lines is perceived as antithetical to the postmodernist project. In "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture," Hall believed that the subversive power of Black culture was its status of "site of contestation."[33] Hall wrote,

> "Black popular culture is a contradictory space. It is a sight of strategic contestation. But it can never be simplified or explained in terms of the simple binary oppositions that are still habitually used to map it out: high and low, resistance versus incorporation, authentic versus inauthentic, experiential versus formal, opposition versus homogenization."[34]

Hall's concept of Black culture negates the power of this culture to become a strategic means of resistance through tactics of Black solidarity that he views as being racially exclusive. Hall's definition of Black culture repeats the postmodernist bias that this culture is a powerful and meaningful site of contestation only when it surrenders to the hegemony of White culture. Furthermore, Hall argued that Black cultures were "critically determined by the diasporic conditions in which the connections were forged" and that they can survive only through "selective appropriation, incorporation, and rearticulation

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[31] Tommie Shelby, "Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression," *Ethics* 112, no. 2 (January 2002): 260.
[32] Ibid. 3-4.
[33] Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992).
[34] Ibid., 26.

of European of European ideologies, cultures, and institutions."[35] Hall is asking for the death of Black cultures through total assimilation into White culture. How can a culture survive when it is completely assimilated into another one?

Another problematic aspect in Hall's concept of Black culture is his marginalization of Africa's role in its creation, significance, and preservation in the Diaspora. Although he pretends to believe that African origins influenced the Black popular cultures of the Diaspora, Hall insists that such influences are minimal and unworthy of exploration. He vaguely states, "there are deep questions here of cultural transmission and inheritance, and of complex relations between African origins and the irreversible scatterings of the Diaspora, questions I cannot go into."[36] Hall's unwillingness to explore the African influences on the Black Diaspora reveals his conception of Africa as a mere site of origin and myths and not as a real location that the Diaspora reconstructs and re-imagines creatively in its struggles against racism and inequality. For Hall, Africa connotes a dangerous return to authenticity and the denial of difference.[37] In "Stuart Hall's Ethics," David Scott argued that Hall does not deny Africa, but that he simply does not want the continent to be treated as "an ethnographic essence defined by authentic meanings such as 'religion' or 'spirituality' or certain modes of being."[38] Why then did Hall refuse to study African religions and forms of spiritualities which are strong African influences in the Diaspora? According to Scott, Hall searches for "the landscape of an 'Africa' variously reimagined from elsewhere, not remembered but dreamt in its translated 'Afro' idiom."[39] Hall's representation of Africa simply as a mere scenery or backdrop in the Diaspora's mind suggests his desire to cast Africa out of his memory.

In order to fully understand the paradoxes in Hall's conception of Black culture, one needs to refer to his essay "Who Needs Identity," where he recreates the same bias that Appiah made with *In My Father's House* by perceiving all ethnic, racial, or national solidarity as essentialisms.[40] According to Hall, the concept of identity signals neither "that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change" nor "that collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which a people with a shared history and ancestry

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[35] Ibid., 28.

[36] Ibid.,

[37] Ibid.,

[38] David Scott, "Stuart Hall's Ethics," *Small Axe* 17 (March 2005): 11.

[39] Ibid., 11.

[40] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 1.

hold in common."[41] This quotation suggests Hall's dismissal of the importance of collective identity in Black struggle. Hall's criticism opposes the African-centered conception of Black history as a continuum of White oppression that can only be opposed through collective Black resistance. Hall dreads the ideas of Black collective identity and/or identification, ignoring that they are consequences of the dislocation of people and fragmentation of cultures that postmodernist scholars celebrate. What Hall and other postmodernists should know is that African-centered scholars do not deny the existence of such historical ruptures and the strategic reconfigurations of selves they require. What African-centered scholars cannot do, however, is throw Black identity in the dustbin as if were a thing of the past. In "Toward A Pan-African Identity: Diaspora African Repatriates in Ghana," Obiagele Lake made a point from which Black postmodernists might highly learn.[42] Lake wrote, "while there are many differences among indigenous and diaspora Africans, the cultural and political dismembering of African communities on either side of the Atlantic by Europeans constitutes a bond that transgresses geographic and temporal boundaries. These linkages are significant, not only for the potential they have in creating stronger political-economic liaisons between Africa and the Diaspora, but for the role they play in formulating and renewing sociocultural identities."[43] Lake's point of view counters Hall's conception of rigidly and transnationally-conceived identities as being counterproductive and essentialist. Lake's perspective shows that African-centered scholars do not dismiss the heterogeneity in Black cultures and in their various sites of resistance. African-centrists simply want "hybridity" to be theorized without doing harm to the collective ethnic, racial, political, and economic bonding and associations of Blacks who use all these elements as viable means of resistance and survival. In her essay "Representation of Whiteness in the Black Imagination," bell hooks spoke to this effect when she said that the anxieties of Blacks about White racism and exploitation are not just mirages and myth; they are as real as real can be.[44] hooks gave the example of how White people "can 'safely' imagine that they are invisible to Black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people, accorded them the right to control the black gaze."[45] hooks insists on

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[41] Ibid., 3-4.

[42] Obiagele Lake, "Toward A Pan-African Identity: Diaspora African Repatriates in Ghana," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68 (January 1995): 21-36.

[43] Ibid., 21.

[44] bell hooks, "Representation of Whiteness in the Black Imagination" in *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, ed. Paula Rothenberg (New York: Worth, 2002): 21.

[45] Ibid.

the necessity for critics to shift the gaze of Whites on Blacks on that of Blacks on Whites, since, as she shows, Blacks have historically learned to imagine Whiteness from both the turbulent history of racism and apartheid and the ongoing rhetoric of White supremacy.[46] hooks wrote, "returning to memories of growing up in the social circumstances created by racial apartheid, to all Black spaces on the edges of town, I reinhabit a location where Black folks associated whiteness with the terrible, the terrifying, the terrorizing. White people were regarded as terrorists, especially those who dared to enter that segregated space of blackness."[47] hooks' theory of Black resistance suggests the illegitimacy of White oppression on Blacks that postmodernist scholars dismiss in the background, as if it was just a myth that Black people are making up.

Furthermore, hooks lent support to the African-centered concept of Black resistance by criticizing the postmodernists' overemphasis on Black essentialism. Without evoking a simplistic, essentialist 'us and them' dichotomy that would suggest that "Black folks merely invert stereotypical racist interpretations," hooks stressed the need "to focus on that representation of Whiteness that is not formed in reaction to stereotypes but emerges as a response to the traumatic pain and anguish that remains a consequence of White racist domination, a psychic state that informs and shapes the way Black folks 'see' Whiteness"[48] hooks' position creates a compromise on which Black postmodernists and African-centered scholars could agree on, which is the reality of the suffering of Blacks from past to present historical oppression. In order to agree on this concession, both postmodernists and Afrocentrists need to change their approach to the study of Black history and culture. Afrocentrists need to inscribe certain postmodernists' adventurous interpretation of Blackness into their theories. As hooks suggests in "Postmodern Blackness," "racism is perpetuated when Blackness is associated solely with concrete gut level experience conceived as either opposing or having no connection to abstract thinking and the production of critical theory. The idea that there is no meaningful connection between Black experience and critical thinking about aesthetics or culture must be continually interrogated."[49]

On the other hand, the postmodernists need to recognize the importance of unity in the struggle against oppression, especially when it is conceived in non-essentialist terms. As Anna Stubblefield pointed out, the "non-essentialists about race" must deal with the dilemma that surfaces when many

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[46] Ibid., 21-22.

[47] Ibid., 22.

[48] Ibid., 21.

[49] bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness," in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End, 1990), 23.

champions of civil rights struggle in the United States say that "Black pride," "Black unity," and membership to a "Black race" are important source of self-esteem and political strength for African-Americans.[50] One example of such champions is Asante, who declared in *Afrocentricity* that "once we [African-Americans] have entertained the ideas of consciousness, mulled them over, accepted the concept of pan-Africanism, related our Afrocentricity to Africa and the Diaspora, and made terms with our ancestors, we will have dealt successfully with the predicament of consciousness."[51] Further in the book, Asante urged African-Americans to translate pan-Africanism into tangible actions with travel to Africa and association with Africans.[52]

Later, Asante discussed the current attacks on the Afrocentric approach to Black history. He wrote, "there are some people around who argue that Africans and African-Americans have nothing in common but the color of their skin. This is not merely error, it is nonsense. There exists an emotional, cultural, psychological connection between this people that span the oceans and the separate existence."[53] This passage refers to the increasing attacks of a new generation of scholars, including Africans themselves, against the idea of shared identity. One example is Tunde Adeleke, who argued in "Black Americans and Africa: A Critique of the Pan-African and Identity Paradigm," "the depiction of Black Americans and Africans as one people united by cultural attributes and historical experience is seriously flawed at the levels of both theory and practice. Can Black Americans truly claim African identity? Do they really share common interests and challenges with Africans? Have they been drawn together by shared experience? In other words, has there always been a pan-African tradition? If so, how old is it?"[54] Adeleke's essay, which is fueled by the nativism that some African-Americans express about African immigrants in the United States, introduces the troubling notion that the pan-African tradition has not remained strong and lasting in the Diaspora. Adeleke talked about the resentment that some African-Americans have towards African immigrants who may appear to them as being in a "favored" situation with Whites "and not subjected to the degree and intensity of the racism and degradation that the black American experiences"[55] Adeleke's

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[50] Anna Stubblefield, "Racial Identity and Non-Essentialism about Race," *Social Theory and Practice* 21 (Fall 1995): 2.

[51] Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988), 27.

[52] Ibid., 2.

[53] Ibid., 67.

[54] Tunde Adeleke, "Black Americans and Africa: A Critique of the Pan-African and Identity Paradigm," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31, no. 3 (1998): 2.

[55] Ibid., 18.

denial of the existence of strong pan-Africanism among African-Americans springs from the collision between African-Americans and African immigrants. This conflict occurs between two groups with similar ancestry who compete to achieve the illusive American dream that racism and inequality prevent them from reaching fully unless they are united.

It is important for African-centered critics to address the problematics of pan-Africanism because the history of the movement was not stable or devoid of tensions. Black intellectuals disagreed and continue to disagree on key issues such as the meaning of pan-Africanism and Black struggle. These divergences, which need to be uncovered and examined, do not signal the death of pan-Africanism. They simply suggest the diverse ways in which Blacks define themselves. For example, in *Africa's International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependency and Change*, the African scholar Ali Mazrui argued that concepts such as trans-Atlantic pan-Africanism, which refers to "solidarity encompassing the peoples of the Black Diaspora in the Americas as well as the African continent" and global pan-Africanism, which "brings together all these centers of Black presence in the world, and adds the new Black enclaves in Britain, France and other European countries, which have come partly from the Caribbean and partly from the African continent itself," are limited because they exclude the Arab and Berber populations of Africa.[56] Mazrui's definition of pan-Africanism supports the postmodernist notion that pan-Africanism does not acknowledge the diversity of Black populations and locations, or that it is a nationally or racially exclusivist ideology. Mazrui confuses "pan-Africanism" with "nationalism," which do not mean the same thing. The solidarity that people from West Africa or North Africa build along national lines are nationalisms, not pan-Africanisms, even when they may be driven by the search for pan-Africanist or pan-Arabist political alliances against colonialism within Africa from diverse geopolitical viewpoints. Moreover, Mazrui puts various forms of nationalisms such as pan-Arabism and Africanism in the same boat. These nationalisms must not be conceptualized in racial lines only, since the Arab, French, English, or Portuguese speaking nations in Africa have populations of different races that may identify with either pan-Arabism or pan-Africanism, or with both and more. In this sense, pan-Africanism is a global Black movement of identification and struggle for social justice even when it has discrete influences in and relationships with pan-Arabism.

Mazrui's problematic definition of pan-Africanism suggests that the tension between Black intellectuals on the nature of Black struggle and culture do not occur between postmodernists and Afrocentrists only. Even Mazrui,

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[56] Ali Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependency and Change* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1977), 68-69.

who is better classified as "African-centered" due to his flux positions on Black nationalism, sometimes shares the idea of the sterility of race as a criterion of identification that is commonly heard from postmodernists. Yet Mazrui is nothing close to a postmodernist. He is an African-centered scholar who views transnational pan-Africanism as being more important than regional pan-Africanism. In "Pan-Africanism Versus Pan-African Nationalism: An Afrocentric Analysis," Kwame Nantambu accused Mazrui's theory of pan-Africanism for perpetuating "the European divide-and-conquer maneuver" since "it not only deletes the vital revolutionary variable in the struggle, but, more important, it also disintegrates the pan-African movement."[57] Contrary to Nantambu's rationale, Mazrui's emphasis on the diversity of racially and geographically-determined political movements in the Sahara and the trans-Saharan world, and his focus on global pan-Africanism, strengthen and enrich the study of pan-Africanism. Yet, Nantambu's argument that the locally-specific pan-African movements must not be given more importance than the global is convincing. Nantambu writes, "the Pan-African struggle should not limit itself to any geographically dispersed or dislocated African peoples or their descendants. To do so is to play into the hands of the colonizer, thus enhancing the colonizer's continued control and exploitation of us. Our specific geographic dispersal came about by the design, not the accident of slavery. Our African ancestors had no input into selecting the final destination where they would labor as slaves for more than three centuries."[58] Nantambu's assertion emphasizes the importance of interpreting Black struggle outside of the gaze of the European colonizer, just as hooks has encouraged us to do with race. In order to regain a sense of themselves, to fight racism and inequality, and to struggle to transcend the discord between continental Africans and those in the Diaspora, Blacks on both sides of the Atlantic ocean need a concept of pan-Africanism that challenges and acknowledges the unity between them. Moreover, pan-Africanism must be conceived as having both cultural and political components. Culturally, it bridges the divide between the Diaspora and Africa by pointing to shared values that persist amidst diversity and hybridity. In this sense, as Alvin B. Tillery pointed out, by regarding Africans and African descendants abroad as a unit, and by seeking to "regenerate and unify Africa and promote a feeling of oneness among the people of the African world," pan-Africanist movements help us "use African heritage to relay political and cultural symbols aimed at building bonds between disparate groups."[59] How can this hybridist conception of pan-Africanism exist when

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[57]Kwame Nantambu, "Pan-Africanism versus Pan-African Nationalism: An Afrocentric Analysis," *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 5 (May 1998): 563.
[58] Ibid., 563.
[59] Alvin B. Tillery, Jr., "Reconnecting with Africa," in *African Diaspora: African*

postmodernists continue to negate the discourse of people of African descent who truly believe that African-centered cultural and political symbolisms are means of contestation of and resistance against power? A perfect meeting-ground between African-centered and postmodernist scholars can happen only when postmodernists change the lens through which they interpret African-centered concepts of culture in terms that replicate the elitism, classism, patronizing, and condescension of the former colonizers. bell hooks said it best when she argued in *Postmodern Blackness* that "The postmodern critique of 'identity,' though relevant for renewed Black liberation struggle, is often posed in ways that are problematic. Given a pervasive politic of White supremacy which seeks to prevent the formation of radical Black subjectivity, we cannot cavalierly dismiss a concern with identity politics."[60] hooks further said, "any critic exploring the radical potential of postmodernism as it relates to racial difference and racial domination would need to consider the implications of a critique of identity for oppressed groups. Many of us are struggling to find new strategies of resistance. We must engage decolonization as a critical practice if we are to have meaningful chances of survival even as we must simultaneously cope with the loss of political grounding which made radical activism more possible."[61] bell hooks' statement is an urgent warning to Black scholars of diverse schools of thoughts to bridge the gaps that have arisen from the postmodernist representation of Black identity and collective unity in struggle as essentialist. hooks' theory cautions postmodernist scholars against denying the voices of the oppressed Blacks whose sense of self lies in the stories of liberation they tell to oppose the colonialism and racism that White gazes and narratives of Black identity have historically enforced. In order to validate Black voices, postmodernists must authenticate them at first. This validation requires that postmodernists find a compromise with African-centered theories by acknowledging the diverse and complex ways in which pan-Africanism has survived as a potential means of liberation struggle, despite the contradictions that have been developed within and around it since its inception.

African-centered and postmodernist scholars have defined pan-Africanism in very different and oppositional ways that have prevented the existence of an integrated and constructive approach to the study of the historical and cultural connections between the Black Diaspora and Africa. This divide must be bridged so that the full history of pan-Africanism, which is complex due to the multiple ways in which Black intellectuals of the West

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Origins and New World Identities, eds. Ali A. Mazrui, Isidore Okpwcho, and Carol Boyce Davies (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2001), 509.

[60] hooks, *Postmodern Blackness*, 26.

[61] Ibid., 26.

and of Africa construct their relationships with Africa, can be written. An holistic and constructive approach to the study of pan-Africanism requires a subtle definition of the term that stresses both continuity and change in the development of the movement and its ideologies as well as the specific contexts in which it evolved in the Diaspora or in Africa.

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