

Two Scholar-Activists on Cultural Consciousness and National Liberation: Cheikh Anta Diop and Frantz Fanon

Chenelle N. Idehen¹

Abstract

This article examines the groundbreaking scholarship and theories that Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986) and Frantz Omar Fanon (1925-1961) shared at the First and Second International Congresses of Black Writers and Artists organized by Pan-African journal and publishing house *Présence Africaine* in Paris, France in 1956 and Rome, Italy in 1959. Drawing on the archives of Diop and Fanon, this article explores the relationship between cultural consciousness and modern African national liberation struggles within the ideas they expressed at the First and Second International Congresses in 1956 and 1959. Through qualitative analysis of Diop's and Fanon's writings and life histories, this paper finds that Diop's scholarship advocates a revolutionary Pan-African ideology for national self-determination in Senegal and continental Africa firmly grounded in African historical consciousness while Fanon's work advances a radical political ideology that countenances the tenets of Arab colonialism in its contest against French colonialism in Algeria. This examination of Diop's and Fanon's pioneering scholarship and praxis problematizes the marginalization of African culture and history within Fanon's theories of decolonization and nationalism without losing sight of the sociohistorical context. This paper demonstrates that Diop and Fanon are vital models for how scholar-activists can begin to conceptualize the critical role African culture and history plays in overcoming Eurasian intrusions into one's consciousness during the ongoing quest for continental and diasporan African unity and sovereignty.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism, Cheikh Anta Diop, Consciousness, Frantz Fanon, Political and Social Thought, Afrocentricity, Cultural Nationalism

¹ Chenelle N. Idehen, Esq., MA, PhD Student, Africology and African American Studies, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA
Email: chenelle.idehen@temple.edu

Imhotep Graduate Student Journal 63-78. © 2025 Idehen. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives License, which permits the user to copy and distribute the work in unadapted form only, for noncommercial purposes only, provided that the original authors and source are credited.

DOI: 10.15367/hx85ea60

<https://tuljournals.temple.edu/index.php/imhotep/index>

Introduction

Following the Second European International War (World War 2), Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986) and Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), two of the most influential Pan-African scholar-activists of the 20th century, moved to France to pursue their university education and greatly impacted the development of political ideology and revolutionary praxis during Africa's modern national liberation struggles. Diop, a Senegalese activist and polymath, studied physics, philosophy, linguistics, anthropology, history, chemistry, and Egyptology at Sorbonne University in Paris, France (Asante 2007b; Adi and Sherwood 2003). Diop synthesized his personal experience and multidisciplinary research to produce holistic, scientific, African-centered historiography and knowledge. Diop's innovative Afrocentric historiography informed the unifying Pan-African political ideology he conceptualized to guide the revolutionary nationalist struggles of the African peoples of Senegal against French colonialism (Diop 1974; Diop 1989; Asante 2007b). Fanon, a Martinican psychiatrist and activist, who studied medicine, literature, and philosophy at the University of Lyon produced persuasive anti-colonial and anti-racist rhetoric in favor of Arab colonialism in its contest against French colonialism in Algeria (Fanon 1967; Fanon 2004; Shatz 2024). Thus, he directed the Pan-African intellectual community to regard non-indigenous, Arab Islamic culture, the core of Algerian national consciousness, as an example for authentic African liberation struggles elsewhere in Africa.

Taking their cue in part from the popular Négritude movement of the 1930s founded by Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, and Léon-Gontran Damas (Mazama 2003, 25), Diop and Fanon, emerged as brilliant scholars and political theorists who assessed the ways in which African culture and history

acted as a catalytic substance and indispensable tool in African peoples' quest for national self-determination and Pan-African solidarity. Hakim Adi explains "what underlies the manifold visions and approaches of Pan-Africanism and Pan-Africanists is a belief in the unity, common history and common purpose of the peoples of Africa and the African diaspora and the notion that their destinies are interconnected" (Adi 2018, 2). Pan-Africanists also emphasize "the liberation and advancement of the African continent itself, not just for its inhabitants, but also as the homeland of the entire African diaspora" (Adi 2018, 2). *Présence Africaine*, a premier Pan-African academic journal and publishing house founded in 1947 by Alioune Diop and Christiane Yandé Diop, in Paris, France, served as a key organizational hub and cultural thought leadership platform for African intellectuals, such as Diop and Fanon during modern African struggles for sovereignty (Adi 2018, 187-188). In addition to producing scholarly publications, *Présence Africaine* organized two Pan-African cultural conferences, the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris, France (September 10-22, 1956) and the Second International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome, Italy (March 26-April 1, 1959), at which Diop and Fanon (and several other Black luminaries) presented their groundbreaking scholarship on the nature and role of African culture and history in the unfolding decolonization process and African revolutionary nationalist struggles (Adi 2018, 187-189).

Continental and diasporan Africans brought into being this forward-thinking Pan-African intellectual collective to ameliorate the wretched conditions of African life and the cultural alienation fostered by Eurasian domination, and to achieve Africa's destiny, freedom. As contemporaries in the Pan-African scholar-activist community

facilitated by *Présence Africaine*, Diop, a son of the African continent, and Fanon, a son of the African diaspora, strategized collaboratively with each other and numerous other radical students, intellectuals, and professionals to clarify the ideologies and objectives of African wars for national liberation in Senegal and Algeria and against the oppressive white racial supremacist forces of European colonialism operating elsewhere in Africa and globally. This article will attempt to demonstrate the significant contributions of Diop, a Senegalese nationalist, and Fanon, an anti-colonialist and anti-racist, to Pan-Africanist discourse made at the First and Second International Congresses in 1956 and 1959 about the relationship of African cultural consciousness to achieving African unity and national liberation. This article begins with a discussion of Diop's revolutionary scholarship and praxis centering African cultural and historical consciousness in strategizing for African wars of liberation followed by a discussion of Fanon's radical scholarship and praxis centering Arab, rather than African, cultural and historical consciousness. The scholarship of Diop and Fanon shared at these two momentous Pan-African convenings serve as model texts to analyze the ways in which scholar-activists can productively engage with African culture and history in order to overcome Eurasian intrusions into one's consciousness during the ongoing quest for Pan-African unity and sovereignty.

Methodological Considerations

Africology is the disciplinary study of African and other phenomena from an Afrocentric perspective, transcontinentally and transgenerationally (Asante 2003, 49). Ama Mazama, Professor and Chairwoman of the Africology and African American Studies Department at Temple University, explains that

The challenge is monumental: our liberation, Afrocentricity contends, rests upon our ability to systematically displace European ways of thinking, being, feeling, etc. and consciously replace them with ways that are germane to our own African cultural experience. Key idea here: epistemological centeredness.

Afrocentricity, Molefi Asante tells us, establishes "A frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person... it centers on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world... as an intellectual theory, Afrocentricity is the study of the ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as the key players rather than victims. This theory becomes by virtue of an authentic relationship to the centrality of our own reality, a fundamentally empirical project." (1991:172) (Mazama 2003, 5)

Eurocentrism, the hegemonic ideology undergirding the various disciplines of the Pan European Academy, attempts to universalize the particular values, standards, and perspectives of Europe (Ani 1994). Afrocentricity (re)locates African people and phenomena as agents and subjects within African history and culture as we have been moved off our terms.


Cheikh Anta Diop: African-Centered Historical Consciousness and National Liberation

Cheikh Anta Diop was born in Caytou, Senegal on December 29, 1923, when Senegal was occupied by French colonialists (Asante 2007b, 1). Asante reveals, "the title 'Cheikh' was given to establish him as a legitimate heir to the great tradition of Islamic scholarship and

intellectual erudition that had emerged among the Mourides” (Asante 2007b, 1). In 1946, Diop moved to Paris to pursue higher education at Sorbonne University during the era of burgeoning Pan-African cultural solidarity and active African nationalist movements vying for control over decolonization following the Second European International War (World War 2). Adi and Sherwood explain that “from 1946 onwards Diop was a leading student activist in the anti-colonial and Pan-African movements amongst students in France” (Adi and Sherwood 2003, 40). Diop published his trailblazing African-centered works and organized continental and diasporan African congresses and conventions in Paris, France. Diop was a “founding member, and from 1950–3, secretary-general of the Association des Étudiants du Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (AERDA), the student wing of the Francophone Pan-African anti-colonial movement that had been founded in Bamako [Mali] in 1946” (Adi and Sherwood 40). Diop was also an active leader in “many of the other Pan-African student organizations in France, including the Association Générale des Étudiants Africains en Paris (AGEAP), which was founded in 1946 with African independence from France as its primary goal” (Adi and Sherwood 40). In 1951, Diop helped to organize the first Pan-African student congress in Paris, France after the Second European International War in which “the London-based West African Students’ Union” participated (Adi and Sherwood 40). Asante explains, “Cheikh Anta Diop followed the classic pattern of African intellectuals by combining research interests with political actions. This combination is easily born out of an intellectual temperament which seeks to respond to the concrete conditions of people” (Asante 20007, 10).

Adi and Sherwood explain that “it was during the late 1940s in the famous

Présence Africaine, the influential journal that [Cheikh Anta] Diop helped to establish, that he first expounded his Afrocentric ideas on the ‘African origin of civilization’ and the significance of Ancient Egypt as a profoundly African civilization” (Adi and Sherwood 2003, 40). The journal “provided Diop and other scholars the opportunity to reach audiences of African scholars and lay persons that had never been targeted by intellectual or academic journals” (Asante 2007b, 7). In 1951, Diop submitted his doctoral dissertation on the African origin of pharaonic Kemetic civilization, but the faculty at Sorbonne University rejected his research (Adi and Sherwood 41).

Undeterred, Diop subsequently published his extensive original research in *Présence Africaine* in 1954 as *Nations nègres et Culture De l’antiquité negre égyptienne aux problemes culturels de l’Afrique Noire d’aujourd’hui*, which won him international acclaim as a historian (Asante 2007b, 8; Adi and Sherwood 2003, 41). Diop used the full breadth and depth of his multidisciplinary knowledge across Egyptology, African history, physics, linguistics, and anthropology and skill to operationalize African-centeredness by restoring ancient  *kmt*: Kemet as an African civilization. Diop re-asserted African cultural and historical consciousness to directly challenge false, Eurocentric historiography produced by the Pan European Academy (Asante 2007b, 123; Diop 1976; Diop 1996). Diop’s early scholarship and political activism were directed at developing African political ideology for continental unity and sovereignty and the African Renaissance, which would counter the cultural alienation and socioeconomic maldevelopment fostered by European governments.

In February 1952, Diop wrote about the need to elaborate African political ideology and to restore historical and cultural consciousness of ancient Kemet in order to

achieve continental unity and sovereignty for the nations of Africa (Diop 1996, 47). In “Towards an African political ideology” published in *La Voix de l’Afrique noire*, the monthly newsletter of AERDA, Diop explains the problematic condition of the African personality: “the personality of the African is no longer rooted in a historical and cultural past recognized by a national consciousness. Colonizers understood that national culture is the most solid fortress of security that a people can build for itself in the course of its history” (Diop 1996, 50). Diop recognized that European imperial-colonial systems intentionally enforced cultural alienation on African people submerged under European occupation. It is evident that “Diop’s ideas had a major influence on the anti-colonial thinking of other Francophone African students and undermined the racist ideas then prevalent that Africa had no history and the French colonialist theory of assimilation” (Adi and Sherwood 40). From his early days of scholar-activism, Diop explicitly ties consciousness of the history and culture of ancient Kemet’s pharaonic civilization to Senegalese and Pan-African national liberation.

In 1956, Diop presented a paper at the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris titled “The Cultural Contributions and Prospects of Africa” concerned with African cultural and historical consciousness and industrialization in Africa (Diop 1996, 109-118). The 1956 Pan-African Congress brought together Jean Price-Mars, Césaire, Senghor, Frantz Fanon, Richard Wright, Mario de Andrade, and James Baldwin, among many others, to address Négritude themes, and engage with African culture to propose solutions to the problems posed by European colonialism-imperialism (Adi 2018, 187). Adi explains “Although there were many established writers and artists present, including Senghor

and Césaire, the congress is perhaps most significant today for the presentation of the ideas of two figures who are barely known at the time, Frantz Fanon and Cheikh Anta Diop” (Adi 2018, 188). Diop built on his pioneering research on Africa’s cultural contribution to world history and proposed a corrective, comprehensive methodology, Diopian historiography, for African people reclaiming knowledge of the African cultural past. Diop explains, “from such knowledge of our past, it will be possible to establish the African contribution to world progress by a simple comparative method, beginning with the fundamental traits of African culture and taking into account chronology” (Diop 1996, 110). At this 1956 convening, Diop pointed to several lines of evidence that identified the African cultural origin of dynastic Kemet, such as comparative analysis of Kemetian (ancient Egyptian) language and cultural practices with other African societies. Diop was “able to discover for certain that ancient Egyptian pharaonic civilization was a black civilization” through using multidisciplinary evidence spanning “anthropological, ethnological, linguistic, historical and cultural arguments” (Diop 110). Diop introduced a new understanding of history when he established the African heritage of Kemet, the ancient roots of African historical consciousness and sovereignty, and the empirical foundation for the cultural unity of Africa across space and time (Clarke 1989; Asante 2007a).

Diop expressly linked African historical and cultural consciousness to African national liberation and explains “by thus rediscovering our past we are contributing to the recreation of the historical consciousness without which no great nation can be built” (Diop 1996, 114). Diop addressed the ancestral sources of African political ideology and operationalized the use of culture as a tool in liberation struggles. In Diop’s view, “the notion of culture is tied to

the emergence of a multinational state embracing almost the entire continent. Culture will be used as a weapon in this struggle and victory over colonialism. This weapon must at all times be adapted to the struggle for national independence, culture in the service of the struggle for national liberation” (Diop 114). Diop’s Pan-Africanist vision of a sovereign, multinational, continental state requires “an ideological and cultural superstructure to serve as one of its major protections. The proposed continental state must be aware of its past which presupposes the elaboration of a general history of the continent embodying the specific histories of the different nationalities” (Diop 1996, 114). Asante clarifies that “Diop was a true nationalist...To say that Diop was a nationalist as a political figure is to understand him as one of the key intellectual interpreters of what it meant for Senegalese to be for themselves” (Asante 2007, 13).

Diop addresses the challenges posed by Africa’s linguistic “unity in diversity” to the creation of the multinational continental state. Diop states, “the real pillar of culture is language. Several African intellectuals are powerless in the face of difficulties arising from the African linguistic mosaic. They forget that this situation exists everywhere and is in no way peculiar to Africa” (Diop 1996, 114). Diop contends that, “choosing an African language that can be used in government is possible. But we must not underrate the difficulties involved because these difficulties must come up in the debates” (Diop 1996, 115). Diop also argues that African nations must harness Africa’s natural resources to provide an economic engine to ensure sovereignty, explaining that it is, “through an all-out industrialization that we can acquire the necessary material power to guarantee our political boundaries” (Diop 1996, 117). Diop’s scholarship on the history of African national self-determination provides robust empirical support for

“ancient roots of African political independence” (Simon-Aaron 2014, 267). Grounded in Africa’s extensive history of sovereign nations, Diop expounds on his clear vision of self-determining nations employing African languages and consciously centering the culture and chronology of African cultural/ethnic history. As Molefi Asante explains, “Diop’s conception of African-centeredness remains fundamental to the Afrocentric revolution because it redirected philosophical and historical inquiry to the role and place of Africa prior to Arab and European colonialism” (Asante 1990, 117). Centeredness in the face of Arab and European negations of African reality is at the core of Afrocentricity and the Africological enterprise.

At the Second International Congress of Black Writers and Artists held in Rome, Italy in 1959, Diop presented a seminal paper titled “Africa’s Cultural Unity.” Diop kept African civilizational anteriority, and the unity of Africa’s cultural manifestations firmly centered in his framework to liberate African minds overburdened by European colonialism. Diop avers that the “cultural unity of ancient Africa can be found in the organization of the family, the state, and the concept of royalty, in the philosophical and moral systems” (Diop 1996, 129) and confirms that the basis of the family in Africa is “matriarchy” (Diop 1996, 130). By “matriarchy,” Diop means gender complementarity or “a harmonious dualism, an association accepted by both sexes, the better to build a sedentary society where each and everyone could fully develop by following the activities best suited for his physiological nature. A matriarchal regime, far from being imposed on many by circumstances independent of his will, is accepted and defended by him” (Diop 1989, 108). Diop possessed remarkably deep, and unparalleled knowledge of African traditions


and examined Africa's cultural manifestations across space and time from a grounded, centered perspective.

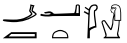
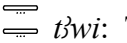
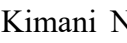
Diop posits an early formulation of his theory that people adapting to similar geographic and environmental conditions leads to culturally specific understandings of reality. Diop identifies the geo-environmental dimensions of what later becomes his Two Cradle Theory which help explain the difference in family organization and cultural orientation that developed over time between African societies and Eurasian societies. Diop explains "the demands of nomadic existence and those of sedentary existence contain all elements necessary for understanding the subject" (Diop 1996, 130), i.e., the genesis of the African matrifocal family and the Aryan patriarchal family. Regarding Africa, Diop notes "the southern matriarchal family is a product of a different set of material and climatic conditions and objectives", i.e. absence of nomadic existence. (Diop 1996, 131). Diop discerns the expression of the African worldview in the matrifocal family structure and kingship institution:

Matriarchy is tied to agricultural life for economic reasons. Women are the most sedentary element in society. If the boy had to transmit political rights, property, ancestral, cult or any other social values, all that would be lost, scattered outside and tradition would quickly cease to exist. His elder or younger sister transmits the rights of inheritance and succession to the throne and even the most recognized kinship from the African viewpoints. (Diop 1996, 132)

Diop also argues that these two cradles, competing family systems and realities, converged in the geographical zone spanning the Mediterranean and "Western Asia as far as the Indus" (Diop 1996, 136).

Diop obtained his PhD in 1960 and published another of his Afrocentric master works in 1963: *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy & of Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (1989). In *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, Cheikh Anta Diop cogently explicates the Two Cradle Theory, building on the scholarship he discussed at the 1959 Second Congress, on the profound cultural, historical, linguistic unity of African people, in part, by tracing the social institution of matrifocality and the moral principle of gender complementarity in African societies. In summary, Diop concludes that ancient Africa was the antithesis of ancient Europe with respect to its concept of the family, the state, philosophy, and ethics (Diop 1989, 136). *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* solidifies the scientific and cultural foundations of Diop's revolutionary, Afrocentric conception of Africa's history, which enshrines the inalienable dignity and centrality of African women and restores African women, men, and children to their rightful role as agents and creators in the historical process. Ifi Amadiume highlights that Diop's monumental scholarship on ancient Africa hinges on the centrality of women enshrined in the dignity of the "matricentric unit," a social institution within African culture (Amadiume 1989, xv). Amadiume points out that, "the fundamental thesis of this work, which rests on African matriarchy, is the least given importance and applied" (Amadiume xviii).

Jacob Carruthers similarly detects the origins of the African worldview, or culturally specific understanding of reality, in the literature of the ancestors of ancient Kemet in the stark distinction they observed between the cultural orientation of African and Eurasian societies. Carruthers points to a treatise on kingship from the 9th Dynasty of Ancient Kemet (2100 BCE), in which the  *Nswt Bity*: King of Upper and Lower Kemet

Khety passed on to his heir, Merikare, the below wisdom about successfully upholding  *m3't*: Ma'at (justice, truth, righteousness, order, reciprocity, harmony, and balance) while protecting the people of  *t3wi*: Tawy (the Two Lands): “Lo, the miserable Asiatic, he is wretched because of the place he’s in: short of water, bare of wood, its paths are many and painful because of mountains, he does not dwell in one place, food propels his legs, he fights since the time of Horus” (Lichtheim 1973, 103-104). Carruthers argues, “what is also apparent is the fact that the worldview of the ancient Black Egyptians contained the formulation of what emerges in Cheikh Anta Diop as the Two Cradle Theory” (Carruthers 1999, 24). Kimani Nehusi asserts that  *pr-3*: Per-aa (Great House; Pharaoh) Khety’s wisdom instruction “identifies significant features of the ancient Egyptian interpretation of the Asiatics’ interaction with the land and explains the Asiatic character as a result of that relationship over a long time” (Nehusi 2024, 5). Like Diop, Carruthers finds ample material in the millennia of records of ancient Kemet to determine “the African worldview is the only viable base for African liberation (Carruthers 1999, 24).

In 1966, Diop and W.E.B. DuBois were both honored with the award for the most influential African intellectuals of the 20th century at the First World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, Senegal (Asante 2007b, 13). Their scholarship represented an African intellectual revolution against hegemonic European control of knowledge production. Asante summarizes: “Diop argued more than any other African intellectual of his time for the uniting of the continent. He was a visionary, seeing all the possibilities of unity, and hoping that the political leaders would have the ability to participate in that vision” (Asante 2007b, 34). Diop’s political ideology and research centered the restoration of consciousness of African languages, culture,

and history in order to upend the white racial supremacist falsification of African and world history animated by European racial prejudice and aimed at inferiorizing African people. The realization of Diop’s concept of African Renaissance, a united, resurgent, victorious Africa activated by deep historical and cultural consciousness, demands that Africans revalorize their national cultures and control decolonization, economic systems, and educational processes in their societies. As an avowed African nationalist, Diop exemplified the Kemetic imperative to know thyself and synthesized his multidimensional study of the African past to distill important lessons and elaborate a new Afrocentric historiography to ground his revolutionary Pan-African liberationist ideology and praxis.

Frantz Omar Fanon: Arab Intrusions into Consciousness and National Liberation

Frantz Fanon was born on July 20, 1925, in Martinique, then and now part of French empire (Rabaka 2010, 29). Fanon built his insightful analyses of the conditions of the colonized peoples guided by his personal experiences growing up in Martinique living under French assimilationist colonial policy and battling French racism and German occupation during the Second International European War (World War 2). In 1945, following exemplary French military service in Morocco, Algeria, and France, Fanon returned to Martinique to complete his secondary education and worked for former teacher Aimé Césaire’s campaign as the French Communist Party delegate to the first National Assembly of the French Fourth Republic (Rabaka 2010, 99). In 1946, Fanon moved to Lyon, France and studied psychiatry, literature, and philosophy (Shatz 2024, 44-45). Fanon engaged with Négritude, an affirmation of Africanity and Blackness,

first with Césaire in Martinique and later within the international Pan-African intellectual community, as well as strands of Marxist and French philosophical theories (Rabaka 2010). While completing his psychiatry residency in southern France, Fanon published *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), a widely acclaimed analysis of the destructive psychological effects of European racism and colonialism on African people, in 1952. Like the concerted opposition Diop faced at his Parisian university, the Eurocentric faculty at Lyon had rejected the manuscript, originally Fanon's doctoral dissertation titled "An Essay on the Disalienation of Blacks," in 1951 (Labigne and List 2010, 657). Following the completion of his psychiatric studies, Fanon was well-equipped to furnish critical, scientific and cultural accounts of the situation of colonized Arab Algerians and to issue a vivid defense of Arab independence struggles against French colonialism. As Reiland Rabaka explains,

Fanon has been half-heartedly hailed as a psychoanalyst, philosopher, sociologist, Marxist, and political activist, but never as a transdisciplinary critical social theorist with concrete radical political commitments to not simply eradicating the wretchedness of the wretched of the earth, revolutionary decolonization, and revolutionary democratic socialism, but to the multicultural masses, transethnic working-classes, women's liberation, and revolutionary humanism. (Rabaka 2010, 8)

In my view, at the 1956 and 1959 Pan-African intellectual congresses, Fanon sought to contribute his multi-dimensional critical discourse to the distinguished service of Pan-Africanism and its restorative and liberationist ends.

Fanon moved to Algeria to serve as chief attending psychiatrist at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria (Shatz 2024, 117-18) in 1953. There, Fanon practiced disalienating psychiatry which explicitly engages with a patient's cultural background and cultural consciousness. Fanon joined the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), the Arab nationalist movement in 1955 in support of the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962) (Shatz 142-43). Fanon attended the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris, France, as a Martinican delegate and presented his paper, "Racism and Culture" the following year (Gordon 2015, 85). In this remarkable study, Fanon diagnoses European racism as an intentional part of a well-defined system of economic exploitation. He asserts that "racism is only one element of a vast whole: the systematized oppression of a people" (Fanon 1967, 33) and describes the colonial situation dictated by European oppressors as "the destruction of cultural values, of ways of life. Language, dress, techniques are devalorized" (Fanon 33). Fanon astutely states when, "psychologists spoke of a prejudice having become unconscious" (Fanon 1967, 37) this statement constituted "verbal mystification" (Fanon 37). Fanon limits his critique of Eurasian anti-Black racism to the European vintage. Lewis Gordon remarks on the widely documented phenomenon of anti-Black Arab racism which Fanon declines to name: "The French knew that many, maybe even most, Arabs hated blacks (and, as many blacks today know across the continent and in the Middle East, that hatred or sense of superiority continues)" (Gordon 2015, 85). Fanon is not operating from a place of African subjectivity when he chooses not to address the realities of anti-Black racism as an aspect of the lived experience of African people living under Arab Islamic political control during his presentation before the

esteemed members of the global pan-African intellectual community.

In “Racism and Culture,” Fanon identifies culture as a resilient power source for sharpening Algerian national consciousness and agency in the face of cultural alienation induced by French racism and colonialism. He reasons that the inferiorized peoples will return to their culture after incomplete deculturation. Fanon explains that “after the absolute valorization of their culture, the indigenous people decide to fight all forms of exploitation and alienation.” (Fanon 1967, 43). In his role as a key FLN propagandist, Fanon recognized consciousness of history and culture as the seed of nationalist resistance, and praised the strength of Arab culture, not indigenous African culture, in its contest against French colonialism in North Africa. Fanon’s approach to advocacy on behalf of Arab colonialism in North Africa brings into focus the distinction between ethnicity and nationality as elements of cultural identity and consciousness. In 1957, Fanon moved to Tunis, Tunisia and began full-time service as member of the FLN, following expulsion from Algeria by the French government for his support of the Arab Islamic nationalist movement (Shatz 2024, 182-184). Fanon served as an editor and propagandist for *Al Moudjahid*, a newspaper published during the Algerian war to apprise the FLN resistance.

Fanon demonstrated his rhetorical effectiveness in the essay “Maghreb blood shall not flow in vain” published in *Al Moudjahid* on February 15, 1958. Fanon writes “We maintain this offer and we say to the Tunisian people that we are together for better and for worse, that the Maghreb blood is sufficiently generous and it offers itself in great streams to the end that from Algeria to Sfax there shall be no more French soldiers

to threaten, torture and massacre the Maghreb peoples” (Fanon 1967, 95). The term “Maghreb peoples” refers to “the Maghreb” or western lands of the Arab empire extending from Western Asia into North Africa (and formerly also Spain), comprising the nations of Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco.² Arab peoples arrived in North Africa from Western Asia riding successive waves of armed conquest beginning in the 7th century CE (El Fasi and Hrbek 1988, 48-49). Thus, Fanon’s discourse on cultural consciousness and national liberation concretely supports Arab settlers in their struggles against Europeans for control over the peoples, land, and natural resources of North Africa. Fanon’s official position in the Algerian nationalist organization supplies the rationale for his unambiguous endorsement of Arabcentric consciousness and concomitant silence on the history of Arab conquest, Arab colonialism, and captive trade and enslavement in North Africa. Fanon’s psychological location is shaped by Arabcentric historiography which legitimizes and misrepresents the Arab invasion of North Africa, Arabization/Islamization of North Africa pursuant to Arab migrations from Western Asia and millennia of Arab and European systems of enslavement in Africa (El Fasi and Hrbek 1988; Segal 2001).

Kwame Nkrumah and the political independence achieved by the peoples of Ghana on March 6, 1957, energized Africa and her diaspora in their push for national liberation (Simon-Aaron 2014, 396-397). Fanon’s contemporaries, Diop and others, distinguished between authentic, African nationalism and liberation struggles, such as those waged by the people of Ghana against British colonialism, and the independence battles fought by Arab Islamic states in North Africa. Fanon served as Ambassador to Ghana for the Provisional Algerian

² Merriam Webster, Inc. “Maghreb (geographical name),” accessed April 24, 2025,

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Maghreb>.

Government (Gouvernement provisoire de la République algérienne), the government-in-exile of the FLN, and attended conferences to internationalize the Arab Algerian cause. Fanon ably fulfilled FLN's public relations purposes and, "the leadership in Tunis was especially pleased to have Fanon represent their Africa policy. In a sense, he *was* their Africa policy, a Black man who looked like other Africans and, like them, had experienced the hypocrisy of France's color blindness" (Shatz 2024, 247). Unfortunately, Fanon misrepresented life in Algeria to his fellow African reformists and liberationists on behalf of the provisional Arab Islamic government. Shatz explains

when Africans asked Fanon if there were many Black people in Algeria, he always said yes, although Black Algerians in the south, like his bodyguard Youcef Yousfi, formed only a small—and oppressed—minority of the country's population. (He reported these exchanges with great amusement to the Manuellans.) After all, as he had written, truth in a colonial war was whatever advanced the victory of the colonized. So long as Fanon represented Algeria in Africa, Algeria was Black. (Shatz 247)

Although Fanon stresses the common nature of the struggle of the colonized peoples of Algeria and the important implications for Pan-African national liberation, he intentionally obscures the glaring contradictions posed by his advocacy of armed struggle on behalf of Arab Islamic colonialism in North Africa.

As a member of the Algerian nationalist movement, Fanon delivered "On National Culture: Mutual Foundations for National Culture and Liberation Struggles," later published in *The Wretched of the Earth* at the Second International Congress of

Black Writers and Artists held in Rome in 1959 (Fanon 2004). The Second Congress was attended by other African intellectuals and revolutionary nationalists, such as Sékou Touré, Eric Williams, Cheikh Anta Diop, and "Fanon who also used his time in Rome to meet with representatives of the National Liberation movement in Angola to offer military training in Algeria" (Adi 2018, 189). Fanon described "France's gruesome atrocities in Algeria and made an uncompromising case for armed struggle, the FLN's way, as a uniquely effective route to National Liberation" (Shatz 2024, 245). From the perspective of Arab Islamic culture, Fanon's essay addressed themes of cultural alienation, cultural/ethnic identity, nationality, and the relationship of cultural consciousness to national independence. Fanon explains the fundamental role historical consciousness plays in the decolonization of the mind: "Reclaiming the past does not only rehabilitate or justify the promise of a national culture. It triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized's psycho-affective equilibrium. Colonialism destroys past, present and future of colonized" (Fanon 2004, 145). In reference to European colonialism's sustained offensive on Africa, Fanon makes plain that "colonialism fosters cultural alienation" (Fanon 2004, 149) and that "colonialism's condemnation is continental in scale" (Fanon 2004, 150). Fanon does not address Arab colonialism nor its condemnation of Africa.

Fanon asserts that cultural consciousness is deeply connected to the process of achieving national liberation. Fanon's dislocation rears its head as he unreservedly tells African intellectuals and activists to look to the Arab Islamic occupation of the African world as an example of reviving historical legacy. He states "the struggle for national liberation was linked to a cultural phenomenon

commonly known as the awakening of Islam. The passion displayed by contemporary Arab authors in reminding their people of the great chapters of Arab history in response to lies of the occupier” (Fanon 2004, 151). Fanon finds that in Arab-occupied territories “nationalist feeling [was] kept alive at an intensity unknown in Africa. It’s not spontaneous solidarity between members of the group. Each member endeavors to praise the achievements of his nation” (Fanon 2004, 152). Fanon describes how the common Arab Islamic nationality was forged during anti-colonial battles against the French occupation, highlighting that the actual Algerian cultural experience is not generically “national,” but Arab. African scholar-activists waging authentic African national liberation struggles were not convinced by Fanon’s public relations statements on the solidarity with the Algerian nationalist struggles as Shatz finds “Fanon had little success in ‘Algerianizing’ the strategies of African liberation struggles” until Amílcar Lopes Cabral of Guinea-Bissau (Shatz 2024, 249). “The effect of his involvement in the continent’s Black liberation movements would be to ‘Africanize’ his own perspective, even his identity” (Shatz 249).

Mário Pinto de Andrade, co-founder of the Movimento Popular Libertação de Angola (MPLA), Cabral, and other leaders of the Conferência das Organizações Nacionalistas das Colónias Portuguesas (Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP)), met Fanon at the 1959 Second Congress (Reza 2022, 866). In 1970, Cabral delivered “National liberation and culture: *The Eduardo Mondlane memorial lecture*” at Syracuse University where he recognizes African culture and African indigenous knowledge systems as critical weapons of resistance, essential to forge a positive vision of liberation specific to the needs of modern Africa (Cabral 1974, 13). Cabral argues that

cultural consciousness-raising efforts for the colonized intellectuals occurs through active solidarity: “re-Africanization in our case-can be started before the struggle but it is not complete until during the course of the struggle, in the daily contact with the masses, and in the communion of sacrifice that the struggle demands” (Cabral 1974, 14). Cabral centers the imperative of raising the cultural consciousness of Africans engaged in the liberation struggle and echoes Fanon’s position that armed nationalist struggle was an act to preserve culture.

Fanon expands on the reciprocal relationship between national consciousness (nationality) and cultural/ethnic identity raised in his FLN writings elsewhere in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In “Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness,” Fanon discusses the nature of national consciousness and the responsibilities of the nationalist bourgeoisie. Fanon calls for activated cultural consciousness but decenters African history and culture in his popular theories of decolonization and nationalism. Fanon operates from borrowed Arab Islamic terms and demonstrates a limited grasp of African history when he does not pause at the notion of calls for “Arabization in Africa” (Fanon 2004, 104). Unlike Diop, Fanon did not intentionally address the chronology and legacy of Arab conquest, Arab colonialism, and Arab captive trade and enslavement in North Africa. Neither Fanon, nor the literature squarely address the problems posed by his warm embrace of Arab colonialism in Africa and the centering of Arab narratives regarding the history of Arab Islamic conquest of North Africa.

Understanding Diop and Fanon as scholar-activist contemporaries provides Pan-Africanists with powerful case studies on the development of modern Pan-African political ideologies and models for continually seeking the African subject place

within revolutionary African sociopolitical theory and liberatory praxis. Fanon capably speaks to the agency and expanding consciousness of the colonized peoples engaged in the educational process of armed struggle. Imploring his audiences to contemplate the cultural consciousness at the heart of the Arab colonial project, Fanon argued that “the conscious, organized struggle undertaken by a colonized people in order to restore sovereignty constitutes the greatest cultural manifestation that exists” (Fanon 2004, 178). Similarly, in applying the accumulated wisdom of global anti-colonial and nationalist fighters to the African nationalist struggles of Guinea-Bissau, Cabral concludes an “armed war of liberation thus implies a veritable forced march on the road of cultural progress (Cabral 1974, 17). Unlike Cabral, however, Fanon’s explicit endorsement of the ideology of Arab Islamic colonialism disregards the lived experiences of Africans in Algeria and Arab states more broadly rather than reflecting ambiguous or implicit support for African people in liberation struggles within Africa and her diaspora. Fanon’s radical anti-colonial writing does not echo Diop’s call to embrace African-centered cultural consciousness or African identity, although that is the logical conclusion in the context of authentic African national liberation struggles (Rabaka 2022, 429-430).

The scholarship that Diop and Fanon shared at the 1956 and 1959 First and Second International Congresses of Black Writers and Artists serve as the objects of inquiry for the analysis herein. Diop and Fanon had several major publications and organized and/or attended numerous Pan-African conferences where they shared their radical, scientific ideas that shaped the contours of Pan-African liberationist movements following the Second European International War (World War 2). I would like to more deeply examine the philosophical and

sociohistorical context that shaped the global Pan-African intellectual community in which Diop and Fanon operated and explore other works by Diop, Fanon and their contemporaries published by *Présence Africaine*. I would also like to explore organizational links Diop and Fanon may have shared as contemporaries and revolutionary freedom-fighters.

Conclusion

Based on a qualitative analysis of their writings shared within the *Présence Africaine* intellectual community, Diop and Fanon determined that cultural consciousness is inextricably linked to national liberation. Both scholar-activists concluded that pan-African liberation requires the restoration of Afrocentric historical and cultural consciousness. On the one hand, Cheikh Anta Diop explicitly promoted African-centeredness and consciousness of African cultural, ethnic, and sociohistorical realities as the sustenance for African nationalist liberation struggles in Senegal and the ultimate objective of the African Renaissance and continental liberation. On the other hand, Frantz Fanon, as a key propagandist for Algeria’s war of independence, unequivocally marginalized African culture and centered the Arab Islamic cultural experiences of the Maghreb peoples and the project of Arab Islamic colonialism in North Africa, as instructive for authentic African liberation struggles. This assessment does not invalidate Fanon’s useful frameworks for decolonization, nationalism, and conceptualizing the ontological reduction of the inferiorized under colonialism and the psychological responses to racism.

Putting the scholarship of Diop and Fanon in conversation recalls the fruitful Pan-African intellectual collaboration engendered at the 1956 and 1959 *Présence Africaine* conferences and provides the path to eliminating the problematic divergence

within Fanon's radical thought and praxis from what should happen in the African cultural context. Pan-Africanists and other scholar-activists should observe the distinction and interplay between notions of ethnicity and nationality in the formation of cultural nationalist consciousness. Uncritical advocacy in favor of one faction of foreigners over another in the Eurasian colonial scramble for control of Africa's resources does not portend African liberation on any scale, national, continental, or diasporan. Thus, scholar-activists must account for Arab infiltration of consciousness and the legacies of Arab colonialism in Africa, as well as Eurocentrism, in order to properly re-locate oneself in an authentic Afrocentric chronology of African statecraft and sovereignty starting with the African origin of civilization.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Chenelle N. Idehen  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9515-6375>

References

- Adi, Hakim. 2018. *Pan-Africanism: A History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Adi, Hakim and Marika Sherwood. 2003. *Pan-African History: Political figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Amadiume, Ifi. 1989. "Introduction" In Diop, Cheikh Anta. *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy & of Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity*. London, UK: Karnak House.
- Asante, Molefi Kete. 1990. *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.
- Asante, Molefi Kete. 2003. "The Afrocentric Idea." In *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, edited by Ama Mazama, 37-53. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Asante, Molefi Kete. 2007a. *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance*. Malden: Polity Press.
- Asante, Molefi Kete. 2007b. *Cheikh Anta Diop, An Intellectual Portrait*. Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press.
- Ani, Marimba. 1994. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Cabral, Amílcar. 1974. "National Liberation and Culture" *Transitions* 45: 12-17
- Carruthers, Jacob H. 1999. *Intellectual Warfare*. Chicago: Third World Press.
- Clarke, John Henrik. 1989. "The Historical Legacy of Cheikh Anta Diop: His Contributions To A New Concept of African History." *Présence Africaine* 149/150: 110-120
- Diop, Cheikh Anta. 1996. *Towards the African renaissance: Essays in culture and development, 1946–1960*. London: Karnak House.
- Diop, Cheikh Anta. 1989. *Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy*.
- Diop, Cheikh Anta. 1974. *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books.

- Diop, Cheikh Anta. 1990. "Annex to Chapter 1: Report of the Symposium on the Peopling of Ancient Egypt and the Deciphering of the Meroitic Script" In *General History of Africa* abridged edition volume II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa editor by G. Mokhtar, 33-61. UNESCO.
- El Fasi, M. and I. Hrbek. 1988. "The coming of Islam and the expansion of the Muslim empire" In *General History of Africa III: Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*, edited by M. El Fasi and I. Hrbek, 31-55. Berkeley, CA: UNESCO.
- Fanon, Frantz. 2004. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. 2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *Toward the African Revolution*. New York: Grove Press.
- Gordon, Lewis. 2015. *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Labigne, Anael and List, Regina. 2010. "Fanon, Frantz." In: Anheier, H.K., Toepler, S. (eds) *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*. New York, NY: Springer. https://doi-org.libproxy.temple.edu/10.1007/978-0-387-93996-4_201
- Lichtheim, Miriam. 1973. *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings. Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mazama, Ama. 2003. "The Afrocentric Paradigm." In *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, edited by Ama Mazama, 3-34. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Nehusi, Kimani. 2024. "Land and Identity in Afrikan Tradition: The Origins of the Ancestral Land Complex." *Journal of Black Studies* 00(0): 1– 20.
- Rabaka, Reiland. 2022. "Return to the Source: Cabral, Fanon, the Dialectic of Revolutionary Decolonization/Revolutionary Re-Africanization, and the African Renaissance." *Journal of Black Studies* 53(5): 419– 440.
- Rabaka, Reiland. 2010. *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon's Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization*. Lexington Books.
- Reza, Alexandra. 2022. "Reading the Radio-Magazine: Culture, Decolonization and the Paigc's Rádio libertação." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 24(6): 857-878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2021.1972821>.
- Simon-Aaron, Charles. 2014. *Three African Social Theorists on Class Struggle, Political Liberation and Indigenous Culture: Cheikh Anta Diop, Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah*. Edwin Mellen Press.
- Segal, Ronald. 2001. *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Shatz, Adam. 2024. *Rebel's Clinic*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.