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Rethinking Africanism through Frantz Fanon: Victimhood, State Fragility and the Dynamics of Ideological Appropriation

Achibi Samuel Dede PhD* & Dienye E. H, PhD**

*Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Nigeria.

**Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State, Nigeria.

samdede.sdx1@gmail.com

hdienye@gmail.com

Abstract

The concept of Africanism, once a potent expression of cultural identity, political autonomy, and collective solidarity, has come under increasing strain in the era of globalization and the New World Order. This article examines how Africanism has been systematically hijacked, exposing the continent to cultural commodification, political misrepresentation, and economic exploitation. Central to this analysis is the precarity and fragility of postcolonial African states, which amplify vulnerabilities and create opportunities for external forces to manipulate African identity. Drawing on Fanonian postcolonial theory, neo-colonialism theory, and globalization theory, the study situates Africanism within historical and contemporary contexts, tracing its evolution from precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods. Contemporary case studies illustrate the mechanisms of hijacking, including the influence of multinational corporations, international financial institutions, and global media, particularly in fragile state environments. The article also highlights pathways for reclaiming authentic Africanism, emphasizing decolonization of knowledge, cultural renaissance, Pan-Africanist strategies, and the strengthening of state institutions and civil society. By linking Fanon's insights to current African realities, the study illuminates the intersections of victimhood, state fragility, and global manipulation, offering both analytical depth and normative guidance for advancing African emancipation in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Africanism, Globalization, New World Order, State Fragility, Victimhood, Cultural Manipulation, Frantz Fanon.

INTRODUCTION

Africanism has long represented a foundation for cultural identity, political autonomy, and collective solidarity across the African continent (Achebe, 1988; Mazrui, 2004). Rooted in pre-colonial traditions and evolving through colonial and postcolonial periods, Africanism historically provided communities with frameworks for self-definition, social cohesion, and resistance against external domination (Rodney, 1972; Mudimbe, 1988). In contemporary times, however, its meaning and practice have become increasingly contested, as globalization and the New World Order reshape the political, economic, and cultural landscapes of African societies (Stiglitz, 2002; Scholte, 2005). Africanism is no longer merely an internal marker of identity but has become a terrain for external manipulation, often serving the interests of multinational corporations, global media networks, and international financial institutions (Tomlinson, 1991; Young, 2010). These contestations raise critical questions about authenticity, ownership, and agency, highlighting the tensions between local cultural self- determination and externally imposed definitions of identity (Mbembe, 2001; Achebe, 1988).

The fragility of many postcolonial African states intensifies these contestations (Mkandawire, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Weak governance structures, institutional inefficiencies, and economic dependency create conditions in which Africanism can be co-opted or commodified for foreign agendas. This manifests economically through resource extraction, conditional aid, trade imbalances, and externally dictated development programs, while culturally and politically, African traditions, symbols, and ideologies are often appropriated, distorted, or misrepresented (Burgis, 2015; Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2017). Such dynamics reflect the structural vulnerability of African societies, leaving them susceptible to manipulation and constraining their capacity for self-determination (Fanon, 1961/2004; Nkrumah, 1965).

Fanon's work offers a critical framework for interpreting these contestations (Fanon, 1963; Fanon, 1967). His analysis of colonialism emphasized the psychological, cultural, and political dimensions of oppression, highlighting how external domination distorts both collective identity and individual subjectivity. In the era of globalization, Fanon's insights remain relevant, providing a lens to examine how Africanism functions as both a site of resistance and a target for manipulation (Adi, 2018; Ngũgĩ, 1986). This intersection of cultural alienation, economic dependency, and political fragility underscores the urgency of re-examining Africanism today, especially as scholars, policymakers, and civil society confront the persistent legacies of colonial and postcolonial exploitation (Mudimbe, 1988; Mazrui, 2004).

This study contends that Africanism is currently at the center of multiple contestations. First, there is the tension between authentic cultural identity and externally imposed definitions, raising questions about who controls African narratives (Achebe, 1988; Mudimbe, 1988). Second, the vulnerability of states in the face of global economic, political, and cultural pressures creates opportunities for manipulation and further weakens local institutions (Mkandawire, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Third, the experience of victimhood among African populations, whether economic, cultural, or political, both reflects and reinforces these structural inequalities (Fanon, 1961/2004; Young, 2010). Such contestations reveal the intertwined challenges of identity, governance, and sovereignty that must be addressed to reclaim authentic Africanism.

The objectives of this article are threefold: to trace the historical evolution of Africanism and its transformation over time; to analyze the mechanisms through which globalization and the New World Order shape and distort African identity; and to propose strategies for reclaiming Africanism grounded in Fanonian thought, decolonization, and Pan-Africanist approaches.

The central argument is that Africanism has been systematically hijacked under globalization, with fragile states and vulnerable populations amplifying its distortion. Nevertheless, Fanon's insights provide a critical framework for reclaiming African identity, restoring agency, and advancing emancipation in twenty-first-century Africa (Fanon, 1963; Adi, 2018).

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Unpacking the dynamics of Africanism within the context of globalization and the New World Order requires clear conceptual delineation. Central to this discussion are the concepts of Africanism, globalization, the New World Order, hijacking, state fragility, and victimhood, each of which carries both historical depth and contemporary contestation. Africanism broadly refers to the ideological, cultural, and political expressions of African identity, encompassing traditions, values, and collective aspirations that have historically guided communities across the continent (Rodney, 1972; Achebe, 1988). However, Africanism is neither static nor monolithic; it has been continually reshaped by colonial encounters, postcolonial governance challenges, and external economic and political influences (Mudimbe, 1988; Ndlovu- Gatsheni, 2013). As such, it becomes a contested space where questions of authenticity, ownership, and agency are constantly negotiated (Mbembe, 2001).
Globalization, in this context, refers to the intensification of transnational flows of capital, information, culture, and political influence, which reshape local realities and identities (Stiglitz, 2002; Scholte, 2005). While often framed as a process of interconnectedness and opportunity,

globalization also functions as a mechanism through which external actors exert control over vulnerable states, influencing their economic, cultural, and political trajectories (Tomlinson, 1991; Young, 2010). The New World Order, similarly, is both a descriptive and normative construct referring to the post-Cold War geopolitical configuration, in which global governance, power hierarchies, and strategic alliances enable certain actors to dominate others (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2017). Within African contexts, this manifests as structural inequalities, conditional development aid, and interventions that often undermine local autonomy, rendering African societies sites of contestation between internal aspirations and external pressures (Burgis, 2015; Mkandawire, 2005).

The notion of hijacking is particularly pertinent when unpacking Africanism. Hijacking denotes the systematic appropriation, distortion, or redefinition of African identity by external actors, often to serve political, economic, or ideological ends (Fanon, 1963; Adi, 2018). This process can take multiple forms, including the commodification of cultural symbols, manipulation of political ideologies, or reinterpretation of historical narratives to suit global agendas (Mudimbe, 1988; Young, 2010). The hijacking of Africanism is facilitated by fragile state structures, themselves products of historical exploitation, uneven development, and governance challenges (Nkrumah, 1965; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

State fragility, therefore, is both a condition and a driver of contestation. Fragile states are characterized by weak institutions, limited administrative capacity, economic dependency, and vulnerability to internal and external shocks (Mkandawire, 2005; Baylis et al., 2017). Such fragility creates environments in which Africanism can be co-opted, manipulated, or marginalized, rendering local populations susceptible to economic, political, and cultural victimhood (Fanon, 1961/2004; Achebe, 1988). Victimhood, in this analytical framework, refers to the condition of populations experiencing marginalization, manipulation, or oppression, often as a consequence of structural inequalities and deliberate external interventions (Fanon, 1963; Ngũgĩ, 1986).

Framing these concepts as contested terrains is critical for a nuanced analysis. Africanism, globalization, and the New World Order are not neutral; each embodies power relations, interests, and strategies that privilege some actors while subordinating others (Mbembe, 2001; Stiglitz, 2002). Similarly, hijacking, state fragility, and victimhood are not incidental phenomena but interconnected dynamics through which African identity, autonomy, and agency are continually challenged and negotiated (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Fanon, 1967). By unpacking these terms, the article establishes a conceptual framework that allows for a critical examination of how external pressures, internal vulnerabilities, and historical legacies intersect, shaping contemporary meanings, uses, and distortions of Africanism.

These conceptual clarifications provide the analytical lens through which the study approaches the hijacking of Africanism. Africanism is not merely a cultural or ideological artifact; it is contested, dynamic, and politically charged construct. Globalization and the New World Order act as both opportunities and threats, producing tensions amplified by fragile state structures and experienced as victimhood by local populations. This conceptual framework foregrounds the intersections of power, identity, and vulnerability, providing the foundation for subsequent historical analysis and critical discussion of strategies for reclaiming Africanism in alignment with Fanon's insights.

Historical Background of Africanism

Africanism, as both a conceptual and practical framework, has evolved through complex historical processes shaped by internal dynamics and external interventions. In the precolonial era, African societies were organized around governance systems, cultural practices, and social structures that emphasized collective identity, social cohesion, and spiritual cohesion (Rodney, 1972; Mazrui, 2004). Africanism in this period was not merely cultural but constituted a political and philosophical orientation guiding societal norms, conflict resolution, and governance (Mudimbe, 1988). Communities drew on indigenous epistemologies and oral traditions to maintain autonomy

and reinforce solidarity, demonstrating that Africanism was deeply embedded in everyday life and social organization.

The arrival of colonialism marked a profound rupture in these structures. European powers imposed arbitrary borders, centralized administrative systems, and extractive economic policies, displacing indigenous authority and knowledge production (Rodney, 1972; Nkrumah, 1965). Africanism became a contested terrain, as its meanings were suppressed, co-opted, or distorted to legitimize colonial domination (Fanon, 1961/2004; Mudimbe, 1988). Colonial control over education, religion, and economic activity not only eroded indigenous governance but also cultivated dependency and internalized inferiority among African populations (Fanon, 1967; Ngũgĩ, 1986). These processes initiated a long-term hijacking of Africanism, laying the foundations for vulnerabilities that would persist into the postcolonial era.

In the postcolonial period, African states faced the dual challenge of restoring sovereignty and negotiating identity within a global system shaped by former colonial powers. Newly independent governments sought to reclaim Africanism through nation-building projects, educational reforms, and Pan-Africanist initiatives (Adi, 2018; Nkrumah, 1965). However, fragile institutions, economic dependency, and continued external influence constrained these efforts (Mkandawire, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Postcolonial Africanism was therefore negotiated within a matrix of internal aspirations and external pressures. Nationalist projects often attempted to unify diverse ethnic and linguistic groups under imported governance models, inadvertently replicating hierarchical structures that undermined inclusivity and local agency (Mazrui, 2004; Rodney, 1972). The postcolonial state thus became both a site of empowerment and vulnerability, perpetuating patterns of manipulation identified by Fanon.

Fanon's analyses provide crucial insight into these historical trajectories. He argued that colonization generates not only material exploitation but also psychological and cultural alienation, which extend into postcolonial societies (Fanon, 1961/2004; Fanon, 1963). The ongoing hijacking of Africanism is therefore not merely a historical artifact but a continuing process in which global and local forces reshape identity, ideology, and cultural expression (Mbembe, 2001; Young, 2010). Understanding this evolution illuminates the persistent tensions between communal self-determination and external manipulation.

Contemporary expressions of Africanism's contestation are evident in the ways globalization and the New World Order interacts with fragile postcolonial structures. Multinational corporations, international financial institutions, and global media networks exploit structural weaknesses, commodifying culture and influencing political processes (Burgis, 2015; Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2017). These dynamics produce economic, political, and cultural victimhood, reinforcing dependency and contestation within African societies (Fanon, 1967; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). By tracing the historical evolution of Africanism—from precolonial autonomy through colonial disruption to postcolonial negotiation—it becomes clear that contemporary struggles over identity, sovereignty, and agency are deeply rooted in enduring structural and historical legacies.

This historical overview establishes the foundation for analyzing the contemporary hijacking of Africanism, showing how globalization, the New World Order, and state fragility interact to reshape identity and reinforce vulnerabilities. The next section will critically examine these dynamics, exploring specific mechanisms through which Africanism is manipulated and contested in today's political, economic, and cultural arenas, while situating the analysis within Fanon's theoretical insights.

Analytical Discussion of Contemporary Hijacking of Africanism

The contemporary hijacking of Africanism reflects a complex interaction of historical legacies, global economic systems, and political power asymmetries. While Africanism historically embodied communal identity, social cohesion, and collective autonomy, the forces of globalization and the New World Order have introduced mechanisms that reshape, distort, and commodify

African identity for external interests (Stiglitz, 2002; Scholte, 2005). These dynamics are intensified by the fragility of many postcolonial states, where weak institutions, economic dependency, and political instability limit the capacity to safeguard cultural, political, and economic sovereignty (Mkandawire, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Within this context, Africanism becomes a contested site in which external actors exploit vulnerabilities to influence identity, governance, and societal organization.

A key dimension of hijacking is the commercialization and commodification of African culture. Global media, multinational corporations, and international tourism often appropriate African symbols, practices, and artistic expressions, repackaging them for external consumption in ways that prioritize market value over cultural authenticity (Burgis, 2015; Tomlinson, 1991). This process undermines local agency, perpetuates reductive representations, and distorts the social and historical meanings embedded in these cultural forms (Young, 2010; Mbembe, 2001). For example, African music, fashion, and visual arts are frequently removed from their original sociopolitical contexts and reframed to appeal to global audiences. Such commodification mirrors Fanon's observations regarding cultural alienation, whereby external forces manipulate indigenous culture to maintain dominance and suppress self-determination (Fanon, 1967).

Political manipulation further illustrates the hijacking of Africanism. International organizations, aid agencies, and foreign governments frequently influence governance structures, development policies, and institutional priorities in ways that serve external strategic objectives (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2017; Nkrumah, 1965). These interventions, often justified as technical assistance or development support, reshape political identity and local autonomy, subordinating indigenous decision-making processes. Fanon's critique of neo-colonialism remains relevant here: external control persists under the guise of modernization, limiting opportunities for authentic self-governance (Fanon, 1961/2004).

Economic dependency also perpetuates the hijacking of Africanism. Many African states remain structurally reliant on foreign investment, loans, and international trade, which constrain domestic policy-making and reinforce external influence (Stiglitz, 2002; Mkandawire, 2005). Global supply chains, debt conditionalities, and resource extraction practices frequently dictate national development strategies, compelling governments to align local priorities with international expectations (Burgis, 2015). This economic dimension of hijacking exacerbates vulnerabilities and limits the capacity of states and communities to reclaim Africanism in a manner that reflects indigenous priorities and agency.

State fragility compounds these challenges. Weak institutional capacity, political volatility, and governance deficits create openings for external interventions, often under the pretext of stabilization or development (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Baylis et al., 2017). In fragile states, Africanism is susceptible not only to external manipulation but also to co-optation by domestic elites who align themselves with global actors to consolidate power and resources (Fanon, 1967; Rodney, 1972). This dual dynamic of external and internal exploitation underscores the complexity of reclaiming Africanism, highlighting the interplay of structural, economic, and political factors in shaping identity and agency.

The cumulative outcome of these processes is the experience of victimhood among African populations. This victimhood manifests economically, politically, and culturally, reflecting the enduring consequences of historical exploitation, postcolonial vulnerabilities, and global power asymmetries (Fanon, 1961/2004; Ngũgĩ, 1986). Populations navigate overlapping pressures, negotiating identity and agency in contexts where cultural authenticity and political sovereignty are continually contested.

Fanon's theoretical framework offers critical insights for addressing these challenges. He emphasized that authentic self-determination requires both psychological liberation and structural transformation, challenging external domination while addressing internalized inferiority (Fanon, 1967; Fanon, 1963). Applying this lens to contemporary Africanism suggests a multi-layered strategy:

resisting cultural commodification, asserting agency in political and economic domains, reforming institutions, and strategically negotiating globalization on local terms (Adi, 2018; Mbembe, 2001). Africanism, therefore, remains a dynamic and contestable construct, capable of being reclaimed and rearticulated as a site of emancipation and critical engagement.

The contemporary hijacking of Africanism results from the intersection of historical disruption, global economic and political structures, and state fragility. Globalization and the New World Order function both overtly and subtly to reshape African identity, producing cycles of vulnerability and cultural alienation. Yet, Fanon's insights illuminate pathways for reclaiming Africanism, emphasizing the necessity of restoring agency and reconstructing identity in ways that are self-determined, critical, and emancipatory. The next section will explore practical strategies for reclaiming Africanism, situating them within Fanon's critique of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and cultural alienation, while addressing contemporary challenges.

Strategies for Reclaiming Africanism

Political Restructuring and Institution-Building

Reclaiming Africanism begins with strengthening political institutions and governance structures. Fragile postcolonial states often lack the capacity to resist external pressures or safeguard cultural and political autonomy (Mkandawire, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Strengthening institutions, promoting transparency, and fostering inclusive political systems are essential for reducing dependency on foreign actors. By reclaiming sovereignty over policymaking, development priorities, and cultural preservation, African states can assert genuine self-determination. Fanon emphasized that political emancipation is inseparable from psychological and cultural liberation, highlighting the need for robust institutions to sustain authentic Africanism (Fanon, 1967; Fanon, 1963).

Cultural Reclamation and Resistance

Cultural reclamation is equally critical. African communities must actively resist the commodification and distortion of their cultural symbols, asserting control over the production, dissemination, and representation of their traditions, arts, and epistemologies (Young, 2010; Tomlinson, 1991). Community-driven cultural initiatives, locally controlled media, and education that foregrounds indigenous knowledge can counter global tendencies to appropriate African culture. By reinforcing cultural pride, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and critical consciousness, societies strengthen identity, cohesion, and resilience against external manipulation (Mudimbe, 1988; Ngũgĩ, 1986).

Economic Empowerment and Self-Sufficiency

Economic independence is a crucial pillar in reclaiming Africanism. Structural dependency on foreign investment, aid, and extractive industries exposes African states to manipulation, shaping policy and constraining agency (Stiglitz, 2002; Burgis, 2015). Promoting sustainable local development, supporting small and medium enterprises, and diversifying economies are strategies to reduce external leverage. Regional cooperation and integration, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), enable collective bargaining and resource pooling, offering opportunities to negotiate globalization on equitable terms (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2017).

Education and Intellectual Empowerment

Education provides the foundation for reclaiming Africanism by decolonizing minds and empowering citizens to engage critically with global forces (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Adi, 2018). Curricula that emphasize African epistemologies, Pan-Africanist thought, and critical analysis equip citizens to define development, governance, and cultural narratives on their own terms (Mbembe, 2001; Mkandawire, 2005). Encouraging African scholarship and research strengthens intellectual sovereignty, enabling societies to resist the external imposition of ideologies and knowledge

frameworks. This reflects Fanon's assertion that psychological liberation is inseparable from material and intellectual emancipation (Fanon, 1967).

Strategic Engagement with Globalization

Reclaiming Africanism does not require wholesale rejection of globalization. Rather, it involves strategic engagement, selectively interacting with global systems to safeguard autonomy and advance local priorities (Scholte, 2005; Stiglitz, 2002). African states can negotiate trade agreements, partnerships, and international collaborations that are equitable, mutually beneficial, and culturally sensitive. By adopting proactive, informed strategies, globalization can transform from a mechanism of exploitation into a platform for empowerment, allowing African societies to assert agency while preserving identity.

Reclaiming Agency and Emancipation

Ultimately, the reclamation of Africanism requires an integrated approach that combines political, cultural, economic, and intellectual strategies. Strengthening institutions, protecting cultural heritage, promoting economic self-sufficiency, enhancing education, and strategically navigating global systems are mutually reinforcing mechanisms that restore agency and selfdetermination. As Fanon asserts in The Wretched of the Earth, the struggle for liberation is both personal and collective:

*"The colonized can see right away if decolonization is taking place or not. The minimum demand that the native makes of the settler is respect for his personality. The very first step in decolonization is the recognition of the native as a human being" (Fanon, 1961/2004, p. 36).

This call underscores that reclaiming Africanism is not merely an intellectual exercise but a practical, emancipatory struggle, demanding active resistance against manipulation, vigilant assertion of identity, and reconstruction of societies on the foundation of justice, dignity, and self-determination.

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