

African Political Thought and Global Justice: Contributions to Debates on Reparations, Resource Sovereignty, and Climate Ethics

Epem, Ubodiom

Department of History Education, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

African political thought has emerged as one of the most significant intellectual traditions contributing to contemporary debates on global justice. Rooted in anti-colonial struggles, Pan-Africanism, indigenous philosophies, and postcolonial critiques, African political thought challenges historical and structural inequalities embedded within the international system. Using data derived from secondary sources, and adopting the use of the Postcolonial theory and Pan-Africanism as theoretical frameworks, this paper demonstrates that African political thought enriches global justice discourse by foregrounding questions of historical redress, collective responsibility, communal well-being, and ethical governance. This paper examined how African political thinkers and traditions contribute to global discussions on reparations, resource sovereignty, and climate ethics. The study reveals that Africa's experiences of slavery, colonialism, economic exploitation, and environmental degradation have generated unique perspectives on justice that extend beyond conventional Western liberal theories. In debates on reparations, African scholars and political leaders emphasize historical accountability, restitution, and transformative justice as necessary mechanisms for addressing the enduring legacies of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. Regarding resource sovereignty, African political thought critiques neo-colonial economic structures and advocates for equitable control of natural resources as a prerequisite for genuine development and self-determination. In the realm of climate ethics, African perspectives highlight historical responsibility, ecological justice, intergenerational obligations, and the disproportionate vulnerability of African societies to climate change despite their minimal contribution to global emissions. The paper concludes that global justice cannot be fully realized without incorporating African perspectives into international policy-making and philosophical debates. Such inclusion offers a more comprehensive and equitable framework for addressing contemporary global inequalities and environmental challenges.

Keywords: African Political Thought, Global Justice, Reparations, Resource Sovereignty, Climate Ethics.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of global justice has become a major concern in contemporary political philosophy and international relations. Questions regarding the fair distribution of resources, historical accountability, environmental responsibility, and economic equality increasingly dominate global discourse. However, much of the traditional literature on global justice has been dominated by Western philosophical traditions, often neglecting intellectual contributions from Africa and other regions of the Global South. Scholars have argued that prevailing theories of global justice frequently overlook the historical experiences of colonialism, slavery, racial domination, and economic dependency that continue to shape contemporary international relations.

African political thought emerged largely as a response to these historical injustices. Thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Frantz Fanon, Ali Mazrui, Henry Odera Oruka, and Achille Mbembe developed frameworks that challenged imperial domination and advocated self-determination, human dignity, and collective development. Their ideas continue to influence contemporary debates concerning reparations for slavery and colonialism, control of natural resources, and ethical responses to climate change.

Despite growing global attention to these issues, significant inequalities remain. African countries continue to face economic structures inherited from colonialism, resource extraction by multinational corporations, and

severe climate vulnerabilities. Simultaneously, calls for reparations have intensified across Africa and the African diaspora as governments and civil society organizations seek redress for historical injustices. Recent initiatives by the African Union have further elevated reparations as a continental priority. The central problem addressed in this paper is the insufficient recognition of African political thought within mainstream global justice debates. By examining African contributions to discussions on reparations, resource sovereignty, and climate ethics, this study seeks to demonstrate the relevance of African intellectual traditions in addressing contemporary global inequalities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative historical and analytical research methodology to examine African Political Thought and its contributions to global debates on reparations, resource sovereignty, and climate ethics. Data are sourced from secondary materials, including books, journal articles, policy documents, conference papers, and reports from international organizations. The study employs content analysis to identify key themes, arguments, and perspectives advanced by African scholars, political leaders, and institutions. A thematic approach was utilized to assess how African political ideas challenge global inequalities and advocate for justice in international relations. Findings are interpreted within the broader framework of global justice theory and postcolonial scholarship.

Definition of Terms

African Political Thought

African political thought refers to the body of ideas, philosophies, and political theories developed by African intellectuals, leaders, and indigenous traditions concerning governance, justice, power, development, and social organization. It encompasses Pan-Africanism, African socialism, postcolonial theory, Ubuntu philosophy, and indigenous governance systems.

Global Justice

Global justice refers to ethical principles governing relationships among individuals, states, and institutions at the international level. It concerns issues such as equality, human rights, poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, and historical responsibility. African philosophers have argued that global justice must incorporate perspectives from formerly colonized societies.

Reparations

Reparations refer to measures designed to compensate or redress historical injustices such as slavery, colonialism, genocide, and systemic exploitation. Reparations may include financial compensation, institutional reforms, debt relief, restitution of cultural artifacts, and acknowledgment of historical wrongs.

Resource Sovereignty

Resource sovereignty denotes the right of states and peoples to exercise control over their natural resources and determine how such resources are utilized for national development and collective welfare.

Climate Ethics

Climate ethics refers to the moral principles guiding responses to climate change, including responsibilities for emissions, adaptation, mitigation, environmental justice, and obligations toward future generations.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial Theory

This paper adopts Postcolonial Theory as its primary analytical framework. Postcolonial theory examines how colonialism continues to shape political, economic, and cultural structures after formal independence. Thinkers

such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said argued that colonial domination produced enduring systems of inequality that persist in global governance and international economic relations. Postcolonial theory is particularly relevant because it highlights the structural injustices underpinning debates on reparations, resource extraction, and climate vulnerability. It challenges Eurocentric assumptions and emphasizes the importance of historical context in understanding contemporary inequalities.

Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism serves as a complementary framework. Pan-Africanism promotes solidarity among people of African descent and advocates collective action against racism, imperialism, and economic exploitation. Leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah viewed political and economic unity as essential for overcoming colonial legacies and achieving genuine sovereignty. Together, Postcolonial Theory and Pan-Africanism provide useful lenses for understanding African demands for reparative justice, economic autonomy, and climate equity.

African Political Thought and Reparations

African political thought has increasingly become a powerful intellectual and ideological framework for understanding and advancing the demand for reparations for slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and other forms of historical injustice inflicted upon African peoples. At its core, African political thought is concerned with freedom, self-determination, justice, human dignity, and the restoration of African agency in global affairs. The reparations movement emerges from this tradition as both a moral and political project aimed at addressing the enduring consequences of centuries of exploitation and racial subjugation. African political thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Frantz Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop, and Walter Rodney argued that colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade were not merely historical events but systemic processes that underdeveloped Africa while enriching Europe and other colonial powers (Fomekong, 2025). Nkrumah's theory of neo-colonialism emphasized that political independence without economic justice would leave African states vulnerable to continued exploitation.

Similarly, Walter Rodney, in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, demonstrated how colonial extraction disrupted indigenous political and economic systems and created structural inequalities that persist today. Reparations, therefore, are viewed within African political thought as a mechanism for correcting historical wrongs and restoring economic, cultural, and political balance (Fanon, 1963). The African Union (AU) has increasingly institutionalized this perspective by placing reparatory justice at the center of continental discourse. In 2025, the AU adopted the theme "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations," highlighting the continent's commitment to addressing the historical legacies of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and genocide through international advocacy and policy initiatives. The AU argues that reparations should include not only financial compensation but also debt cancellation, restitution of stolen cultural artifacts, educational investments, technology transfers, and formal acknowledgment of historical crimes. This position reflects broader African political thought, which sees reparations as a comprehensive process of justice and restoration rather than merely monetary compensation.

The movement also draws legitimacy from international human rights principles, which recognize the rights of victims of gross human rights violations to redress and compensation. Contemporary African scholars and policymakers argue that the economic disparities, social inequalities, and political instability experienced by many African states cannot be fully understood without considering the historical structures created by slavery and colonialism. Consequently, reparations are presented as a necessary step toward achieving global justice and equitable international relations. The African Union's reparations agenda has also received support from African diaspora communities, emphasizing the shared historical experiences of Africans worldwide and reinforcing Pan-African solidarity in the pursuit of justice (Reuters, 2025).

The demand for reparations has become one of the most significant contemporary expressions of African political thought because it seeks to transform historical memory into actionable political and economic justice. Pan-Africanism, which has long served as a foundational ideology for African political consciousness, provides much of the intellectual basis for the reparations movement. Pan-African thinkers argue that Africans on the continent and in the diaspora share a common history of oppression and should collectively pursue justice and

development. This perspective has facilitated growing collaboration between the African Union and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), whose Reparations Commission has developed a Ten-Point Plan for Reparatory Justice. The plan advocates measures such as formal apologies, cultural restoration, educational programs, healthcare initiatives, technology transfers, and economic development projects designed to address the enduring effects of slavery and colonialism (CARICOM, 2014). African political thought views these proposals not merely as historical compensation but as investments in future development and human flourishing.

Furthermore, reparations debates have expanded beyond financial compensation to include the return of looted cultural artifacts, the recognition of colonial atrocities as crimes against humanity, and reforms in global governance structures that continue to disadvantage African nations. Recent AU initiatives have emphasized the importance of legal and diplomatic strategies in advancing reparatory justice at international forums such as the United Nations. Supporters argue that reparations can contribute to healing historical trauma, combating systemic racism, and promoting equitable development. However, the movement also faces significant challenges (Reuters, 2025). Many Western governments have resisted calls for reparations, arguing that contemporary societies should not be held financially responsible for historical actions. Critics within Africa also contend that internal governance failures, corruption, and economic mismanagement must be addressed alongside historical injustices.

Despite these debates, African political thought generally maintains that acknowledging domestic challenges does not negate the responsibility of former colonial powers for historical crimes whose consequences remain visible today. The growing partnership between the AU and CARICOM illustrates a strategic effort to internationalize the reparations agenda and build a global coalition advocating historical justice. As discussions continue within international institutions, reparations have evolved from a symbolic demand into a comprehensive political project that seeks to redefine global relationships based on principles of accountability, equity, and historical truth. In this regard, reparations represent not only compensation for past injustices but also a broader vision of decolonization and the creation of a more just international order.

African Political Thought and Resource Sovereignty

Rooted in the historical experiences of colonialism, slavery, imperial domination, and postcolonial struggles, African political thought offers alternative conceptions of justice, democracy, human dignity, and international relations that challenge the Eurocentric foundations of the contemporary global order. Thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Frantz Fanon, Ali Mazrui, Achille Mbembe, and Henry Odera Oruka have consistently argued that global inequalities cannot be understood outside the historical realities of colonial exploitation and the unequal distribution of power within international institutions (Asiedu, et al., 2024). African political philosophy emphasizes communal responsibility, social solidarity, and collective well-being rather than the excessive individualism that characterizes much Western liberal thought. The concept of Ubuntu, popularized in Southern African political discourse, encapsulates this worldview through the principle that “a person is a person through other persons,” stressing interdependence, mutual recognition, and shared humanity. Such ideas contribute significantly to contemporary debates on global justice because they challenge the assumption that Western political traditions possess a monopoly on universal values. African scholars argue that genuine global justice requires an intercultural dialogue in which diverse philosophical traditions participate equally in defining principles of fairness, rights, and responsibilities. Gutema (2013) contends that the pursuit of global justice must involve a “polylogue” among different philosophical traditions rather than the imposition of a single cultural perspective, particularly given the asymmetrical historical relationship between Africa and the Global North.

Furthermore, African political thought highlights the persistence of structural injustices embedded in global economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and international trade regimes, which many scholars argue continue to reproduce patterns of dependency established during colonial rule. The emphasis on historical accountability and distributive justice has made African political thought increasingly relevant to discussions surrounding reparations, climate justice, migration, and global governance reform (Lauer, 2017). In this regard, African political thought does not merely seek Africa’s inclusion within existing global structures but advocates the transformation of those structures to reflect principles of equality, reciprocity, and shared human dignity. Consequently, African political thought provides both a critique of

contemporary global injustices and a normative framework for constructing a more equitable international order (Mohamed et al., 2020).

The future of global justice will depend significantly on the extent to which African political ideas influence international institutions, governance systems, and emerging global challenges. Contemporary African thinkers increasingly argue that justice in the twenty-first century must address not only economic inequality but also epistemic, technological, environmental, and political forms of domination. Achille Mbembe, for example, emphasizes the need to move beyond colonial categories of race, exclusion, and hierarchy toward a more inclusive conception of humanity capable of addressing interconnected global crises. His work highlights how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary systems of power and argues for democratic futures grounded in human plurality and mutual recognition. Similarly, the African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions Africa as a strong and influential global actor committed to democracy, human rights, justice, peace, and sustainable development, while advocating a more equitable participation of African states in global affairs. This vision aligns with broader demands for reform of international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council, international financial organizations, and global trade systems to better reflect contemporary demographic and geopolitical realities. African political thought also offers important insights into emerging debates concerning artificial intelligence, digital governance, and data justice (Barrett, et al., 2025). Recent scholarship on African data ethics and decolonial approaches to technology argues that global technological systems often reproduce existing power imbalances by privileging Western perspectives and marginalizing voices from the Global South. African scholars therefore advocate principles of communalism, self-determination, inclusivity, and collective welfare in the governance of digital technologies.

Moreover, African perspectives on climate justice emphasize that countries historically responsible for environmental degradation should bear greater responsibility for mitigation and adaptation efforts, particularly given Africa's disproportionate vulnerability to climate change despite its relatively low contribution to global emissions. As global challenges become increasingly interconnected, African political thought offers a comprehensive framework that links social justice, environmental sustainability, technological equity, and democratic participation. The future of global justice will likely require moving beyond narrow state-centric approaches toward a more inclusive and pluralistic order in which African experiences and intellectual traditions play a central role in shaping universal norms (Mbembe, 2018).

African Political Thought and Climate Ethics

Climate change has generated a new arena in which African political thought contributes significantly to global justice debates. Africa contributes only a small proportion of global greenhouse gas emissions yet experiences some of the most severe climate-related impacts, including droughts, floods, desertification, food insecurity, and displacement. African approaches to climate ethics emphasize principles of equity, historical responsibility, and communal well-being. These perspectives challenge dominant frameworks that distribute climate obligations without adequately considering historical patterns of industrialization and colonial extraction.

The Ubuntu philosophy provides an important ethical foundation for African climate thought. Ubuntu emphasizes interconnectedness, mutual responsibility, and collective flourishing. From this perspective, environmental protection becomes a moral obligation rooted in relationships among humans, communities, and nature. African philosophers have also contributed significantly to discussions regarding obligations to future generations. Behrens argues that African ethical traditions provide valuable insights into intergenerational responsibility and environmental stewardship.

Similarly, contemporary scholars advocate integrating indigenous African knowledge systems into climate governance. Traditional ecological knowledge is increasingly recognized as a valuable resource for sustainable adaptation and environmental management. African climate ethics further intersects with reparations discourse. Many scholars and activists argue that climate justice cannot be separated from historical injustices associated with colonialism, slavery, and unequal development. Calls for climate reparations emphasize the responsibility of historically high-emitting countries to support vulnerable regions through financing, technology transfer, and adaptation assistance.

African Political Thought and the Future of Global Justice

African political thought contributes several important principles to contemporary global justice discourse. First, it foregrounds historical accountability. African perspectives insist that present inequalities cannot be understood apart from histories of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. Second, it emphasizes collective responsibility and communal ethics. Unlike highly individualistic approaches, many African traditions stress social interconnectedness and shared obligations.

Furthermore, it highlights the relationship between political freedom and economic justice. African thinkers argue that genuine sovereignty requires control over resources, institutions, and development trajectories. Also, African political thought broadens environmental ethics by integrating indigenous knowledge, intergenerational responsibility, and ecological harmony.

Finally, African intellectual traditions challenge the dominance of Eurocentric frameworks and advocate a genuinely pluralistic understanding of global justice. Scholars argue that meaningful global justice requires intercultural dialogue rather than the unilateral imposition of Western norms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. International institutions should formally recognize historical injustices arising from slavery and colonialism and support comprehensive reparative frameworks.
- ii. African governments should strengthen policies that promote resource sovereignty and ensure that natural resource wealth benefits local populations.
- iii. Global climate agreements should incorporate principles of climate justice, including differentiated responsibilities based on historical emissions.
- iv. Indigenous African environmental knowledge should be integrated into climate adaptation and sustainability policies.
- v. Educational institutions should incorporate African political thought into global justice curricula to encourage intellectual diversity.
- vi. International financial institutions should pursue debt relief and equitable economic reforms that address structural inequalities inherited from colonialism.
- vii. African states should strengthen regional cooperation through the African Union to advance collective positions on reparations, climate justice, and economic sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

African political thought offers indispensable contributions to contemporary debates on global justice. Rooted in experiences of colonialism, slavery, resistance, and nation-building, African intellectual traditions provide critical perspectives on reparations, resource sovereignty, and climate ethics. Through postcolonial critiques and Pan-African visions, African thinkers challenge persistent global inequalities and advocate more inclusive frameworks of justice. The analysis demonstrates that reparations involve more than financial compensation; they encompass structural transformation and historical accountability. Similarly, resource sovereignty represents a demand for economic self-determination and equitable development. In climate ethics, African perspectives highlight historical responsibility, communal obligations, and intergenerational justice. Ultimately, achieving meaningful global justice requires moving beyond Eurocentric frameworks toward a genuinely pluralistic discourse that recognizes African experiences and intellectual traditions. African political thought not only enriches theoretical debates but also provides practical guidance for constructing a more equitable, sustainable, and just international order.

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