

Reframing the Narrative: Africa's Transnational Reawakening and the shattering of Historical Amnesia (1960s-2010s West Africa and its Diaspora)

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Abstract

Africa's post-independence history has often been narrated through Eurocentric, crisis-centred, and state-failure frameworks that marginalise African and diasporic agency. This narrative review reframes that historiography by examining Africa's transnational reawakening from the 1960s to the 2010s, with a particular focus on West Africa and its diaspora in the Caribbean, North America, and Europe. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship, the review interrogates the production of historical amnesia and demonstrates how African political, intellectual, cultural, and economic networks have persistently shaped global processes despite periods of disruption and silencing. Using a narrative review methodology approach, the study synthesises literature across three interconnected phases: post-independence Pan-African mobilisation and global Black solidarity in the 1960s–1970s; fragmentation under neoliberal restructuring and Afro-pessimist discourses in the 1980s–1990s; and reawakening through digital transnationalism, cultural soft power, and renewed diaspora engagement in the 2000s–2010s. The analysis reveals enduring continuity in people-centred transnational agency, even when state-led initiatives weakened. By foregrounding memory, identity, and power, the review challenges linear decline narratives and reframes Africa as an ideational and cultural actor in global history. In doing so, it contributes to the decolonisation of African and diaspora historiography and offers a more inclusive understanding of Africa's place in the world.

Keywords: Africa, Transnationalism, African diaspora, Pan-Africanism, Historical amnesia, Post-colonial theory, Global Africanity

Introduction

Africa's post-independence moment of the 1960s marked one of the most significant political ruptures of the twentieth century, as more than thirty African states, many of them in West Africa, attained sovereignty within a single decade (Cooper, 2002). This period was not merely a transition from colonial rule to statehood but a profound reconfiguration of Africa's relationship with the world. Newly independent West African states such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal

emerged as hubs of transnational political, intellectual, and cultural networks, linking African actors with Black and African-descended populations in the Caribbean, North America, and Europe (Nkrumah, 1963; Adi, 2018). These networks were sustained through Pan-African congresses, student movements, literary circles, trade unions, and liberation struggles, collectively articulating a global vision of African freedom and dignity. From the outset, therefore, Africa's post-independence trajectory was inherently transnational rather than territorially bounded. However, despite this historically grounded interconnectedness, dominant global narratives have frequently marginalised African agency through what scholars describe as historical amnesia. Historical amnesia refers to the systematic forgetting, erasure, or depoliticisation of Africa's past contributions to global political thought, cultural production, and international order (Trouillot, 1995; Mbembe, 2001). Within African and diaspora studies, historical amnesia manifests in the selective remembrance of crises such as coups, debt, and conflict while overlooking sustained traditions of resistance, solidarity, and global engagement. This erasure has been reinforced by the persistence of colonial epistemologies, defined as modes of knowledge production that privilege Euro-American experiences as universal while relegating African histories to the margins of theory and global history (Said, 1978; Quijano, 2000). As a result, Africa is often positioned as a passive recipient of global forces rather than an active co-producer of transnational ideas and movements. The problem this review addresses is threefold. First, African transnational agency remains marginalised within dominant historical and international relations scholarship, which continues to privilege state-centric and Eurocentric analytical frameworks (Bayart, 2007). Second, African and diaspora historiographies have often developed in parallel rather than in dialogue, leading to fragmented interpretations of shared political, cultural, and intellectual histories (Gilroy, 1993). Third, there has been an overemphasis on state failure narratives, particularly from the 1980s onward, which frame Africa primarily through lenses of collapse, dependency, and dysfunction (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). While structural adjustment programmes and economic crises were undeniably consequential, the dominance of these narratives has obscured enduring forms of transnational solidarity, including diaspora remittances, cultural exchange, and political mobilisation. For instance, diaspora remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa grew from approximately US\$8 billion in 2000 to over US\$54 billion by 2019, underscoring the material significance of transnational African connections (World Bank, 2020). Against this backdrop, the aim of this narrative review is threefold. First, it seeks to synthesise interdisciplinary literature on African transnational reawakening from the 1960s to the 2010s, with particular attention to West Africa and its diaspora. Second, it interrogates how historical amnesia has shaped global understandings of Africa by tracing shifts in scholarly and policy discourses across five decades. Third, it aims to bridge African and diaspora perspectives within a single analytical framework, demonstrating their mutual constitution rather than treating them as separate historical trajectories. In doing so, the review foregrounds transnationalism as both a historical reality and an analytical lens for rethinking Africa's global position. The scope of this review is geographically centred on West Africa and its diaspora, specifically in the Caribbean, North America, and Europe, regions historically connected through slavery, colonialism, migration, and post-independence exchange (Adi, 2018). Temporally, the review spans the 1960s to the 2010s, enabling analysis of continuity and transformation across the independence era, the neoliberal restructuring of the 1980s–1990s, and the digital and cultural reawakening of the twenty-first century. Thematically, it focuses on political, intellectual, cultural, and economic transnationalism, encompassing state

actors, non-state movements, and grassroots networks. The significance of this review lies in its contribution to post-colonial historiography and contemporary debates on African global agency and identity. By challenging linear decline narratives, the review aligns with scholarship that repositions Africa as a site of innovation, critique, and global influence (Mbembe, 2017). Moreover, the analysis has implications for foreign policy and global governance, particularly as African states and diasporas increasingly engage in cultural diplomacy, South–South cooperation, and transnational advocacy. In this sense, reframing Africa’s transnational history is not merely an academic exercise but a necessary intervention in how Africa’s role in the world is conceptualised. Guided by this rationale, the review is structured around the following objectives and review questions. The objectives of this review are to examine how transnational African networks have evolved from the 1960s to the 2010s, to analyse the mechanisms through which historical amnesia has shaped dominant narratives about Africa, and to integrate African and diaspora perspectives into a cohesive transnational analytical framework. This review is guided by the following questions: how have African transnational political, intellectual, and cultural networks been represented in existing scholarship, in what ways has historical amnesia influenced global understandings of Africa’s post-independence trajectory, and how can a transnational lens reshape interpretations of Africa’s global agency from the 1960s to the 2010s?

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the conceptual and theoretical framework guiding the narrative synthesis of this review. It establishes the key concepts and theoretical traditions through which Africa’s transnational reawakening and the production of historical amnesia are interpreted across time. By integrating transnationalism, diaspora, global Africanity, and post-colonial and Pan-African theoretical perspectives, the framework provides an analytical lens for examining how memory, identity, and power are produced and contested through transnational networks. This framework informs the organisation, interpretation, and critical evaluation of the literature reviewed. Scholars define transnationalism as sustained social, political, economic, and cultural practices that extend beyond and connect multiple nation-states, creating overlapping fields of interaction that cannot be fully explained by state boundaries alone (Vertovec, 2009). In African studies, transnationalism captures the dense networks linking West Africa to its diaspora through migration, remittances, intellectual exchange, and cultural production. The concept of diaspora refers to populations dispersed from an original homeland who maintain material, emotional, and political ties across borders, often shaping both host and origin societies (Safran, 1991). Extending these ideas, global Africanity denotes a shared, evolving sense of African identity produced through historical experiences of enslavement, colonialism, resistance, and post-independence mobility, rather than through fixed territorial belonging (Gilroy, 1993). Together, these concepts foreground Africa and its diaspora as co-constitutive actors in global history. Scholars distinguish between state-centric transnationalism, which privileges diplomatic relations, regional organisations, and formal interstate cooperation, and people-centred transnationalism, which emphasises grassroots actors such as migrants, artists, intellectuals, activists, and religious movements (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). In the African context, people-centred transnationalism has often been more resilient than state-led projects, particularly during periods of economic crisis. For example, empirical evidence indicates that remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for over 3% of regional GDP by the late 2010s, surpassing

official development assistance in several West African countries (World Bank, 2020). This highlights the analytical necessity of moving beyond state-centric lenses to capture the full scope of African transnational agency. The concept of historical amnesia provides a critical analytical lens for understanding why these transnational dynamics remain underrepresented in dominant scholarship. Scholars trace the origins of historical amnesia to colonial knowledge systems that framed Africa as ahistorical or derivative, thereby legitimising imperial rule (Said, 1978). During the Cold War, African politics were further interpreted primarily through superpower rivalry, reducing African actors to proxies rather than autonomous agents (Westad, 2005). Mechanisms of erasure include selective archival practices, crisis-driven media narratives, and development discourses that foreground failure while obscuring long-standing traditions of solidarity and innovation (Trouillot, 1995; Mbembe, 2001). These mechanisms depoliticise African agency by disconnecting contemporary practices from their historical roots. The theoretical foundations of this review draw on multiple, complementary traditions. Post-colonial theory, as articulated by Fanon (1961), Said (1978), and Mbembe (2001), interrogates how power operates through knowledge and representation, revealing how colonial epistemologies persist in contemporary global narratives. Pan-African thought, advanced by Du Bois (1903), Nkrumah (1963), and Rodney (1972), provides an explicitly transnational political vision that centres African unity and diaspora solidarity as tools of liberation. Global South and decolonial theories further challenge Eurocentric universalisms by situating Africa within interconnected histories of capitalism, empire, and resistance (Quijano, 2000). Where relevant, middle power and ideational power theories help explain how African states and diasporic actors exert influence through norms, culture, and ideas rather than material dominance alone (Cooper, 2014). Integrating these perspectives, the analytical framework for this review links memory, identity, power, and transnational networks. Memory shapes identity by determining which histories are remembered or forgotten; identity informs power by legitimising claims to voice and agency; and transnational networks operationalise power across borders. A narrative synthesis is justified over a systematic review because the research questions are interpretive, historical, and interdisciplinary, requiring critical engagement with theory, context, and meaning rather than statistical aggregation (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). This approach enables a coherent reconstruction of Africa’s transnational reawakening while directly confronting the epistemic silences produced by historical amnesia. *To ensure conceptual clarity, the central concepts underpinning this narrative synthesis are defined and analytically situated in Table 1.*

Table 1

Key Concepts, Definitions, and Analytical Relevance

Concept	Definition	Key Scholars	Analytical Relevance to This Review
Transnationalism	Sustained social, political, economic, and cultural practices that extend across and connect multiple nation-states, producing overlapping fields of interaction beyond territorial boundaries.	Vertovec (2009); Levitt & Glick Schiller (2004)	Provides the primary analytical lens for examining Africa–diaspora connections beyond state-centric explanations.

Concept	Definition	Key Scholars	Analytical Relevance to This Review
Diaspora	Populations dispersed from an original homeland who maintain material, emotional, cultural, and political ties across borders, shaping both origin and host societies.	Safran (1991); Cohen (2008)	Enables integration of African and diasporic experiences as co-constitutive rather than separate historical trajectories.
Historical Amnesia	The systematic erasure, silencing, or depoliticisation of certain pasts within dominant historical and scholarly narratives, often through selective memory and archival exclusion.	Trouillot (1995); Mbembe (2001)	Explains the marginalisation of African transnational agency and the dominance of crisis-centred narratives.
Pan-Africanism	A political, intellectual, and cultural movement advocating unity and solidarity among African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora.	Du Bois (1903); Nkrumah (1963); Rodney (1972)	Anchors early post-independence transnational solidarities and provides historical continuity across periods.
Global Africanity	A shared, evolving sense of African identity produced through transnational histories of enslavement, colonialism, migration, and resistance rather than fixed territorial belonging.	Gilroy (1993); Zeleza (2010)	Conceptually links Africa and its diaspora within a single global analytical framework.
People-centred Transnationalism	Forms of transnational engagement driven by non-state actors such as migrants, artists, activists, intellectuals, and digital communities.	Levitt & Glick Schiller (2004); Vertovec (2009)	Highlights grassroots agency that persists despite state withdrawal or institutional fragmentation.
State-centric Transnationalism	Transnational practices mediated primarily through formal state institutions, diplomacy, and intergovernmental organisations.	Bayart (2007); Cooper (2014)	Enables comparison between elite-driven and grassroots modes of African transnational engagement.
Ideational / Cultural Power	The capacity to influence global norms, identities, and imaginaries through ideas, values, and cultural production rather than coercion or material dominance.	Nye (2004); Mbembe (2017)	Supports the argument that Africa exercises global influence through culture, memory, and symbolic production.

3. The Post-Independence Moment and Transnational Awakening (1960s–1970s).

The 1960s–1970s constituted a foundational era in Africa’s transnational awakening, marked by political independence, ideological experimentation, and renewed global Black solidarity (Cooper, 2002). In West Africa, independence was understood not merely as territorial sovereignty but as part of a broader Pan-African project, defined as the political, cultural, and

intellectual movement advocating unity among African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora (Nkrumah, 1963). This vision positioned Africa as an active node within global struggles against racism, imperialism, and economic domination.

3.1 Independence Movements and Global Black Solidarity

West African leaders emerged as central architects of post-independence transnationalism. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana articulated Pan-Africanism as both a continental and diasporic mission, arguing that Africa's freedom was incomplete without the liberation of all Black peoples globally (Nkrumah, 1963). Ghana's independence in 1957, preceding that of most African states, became a symbolic and material hub for global Black activism, hosting figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Maya Angelou, and Malcolm X (Adi, 2018). Similarly, leaders such as Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal advanced cultural Pan-Africanism through the philosophy of Négritude, which framed Black identity as a source of epistemic and aesthetic value rather than inferiority (Senghor, 1964). Empirical evidence underscores the scale of this transnational engagement, as Adi (2018) documents that by the mid-1960s, thousands of African-descended students, activists, and intellectuals had travelled to West Africa for conferences, education, and political collaboration. These exchanges were not merely symbolic; they shaped policy agendas, cultural production, and international advocacy. Moreover, African states maintained explicit links with civil rights movements in the United States and anti-colonial struggles in the Caribbean, reinforcing a shared political consciousness and challenging narratives that portray African independence as an inward-looking or purely national project (Von Eschen, 1997).

3.2 Intellectual and Cultural Circuits

Intellectual and cultural circuits can be understood as transnational networks through which ideas, artistic expressions, and scholarly knowledge circulate across borders, shaping collective identities and political imaginaries (Gilroy, 1993). During the 1960s–1970s, African writers, artists, and scholars played a pivotal role in constructing these circuits. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ama Ata Aidoo engaged global audiences while remaining deeply embedded in African historical experiences (Achebe, 1975). At the same time, diaspora intellectuals such as C. L. R. James and Stuart Hall drew on African and Caribbean histories to critique imperialism and modernity (Hall, 1996). Institutional spaces further sustained these exchanges. Major cultural events such as the First World Festival of Negro Arts, held in Dakar in 1966, functioned as transnational platforms bringing together participants from Africa, the Americas, and Europe (Diouf, 2013). Journals and publishing houses, including *Présence Africaine*, facilitated sustained intellectual dialogue across linguistic and geographic boundaries. These spaces enabled Africa and its diaspora to co-produce knowledge, countering colonial representations that had long excluded African voices from global canons. The relevance of these circuits lies in their enduring influence, as contemporary African cultural industries particularly music, film, and literature continue to draw on the foundations laid during this period, evidencing continuity rather than rupture in Africa's global cultural presence (Mbembe, 2017).

3.3 Cold War Politics and African Agency

Africa's post-independence transnationalism unfolded within the constraints of Cold War geopolitics, yet African actors were not passive recipients of superpower influence (Westad, 2005). Non-alignment, defined as the refusal to formally align with either the United States or the Soviet Union, became a strategic framework through which African states sought to preserve autonomy while maximising diplomatic leverage (Prashad, 2007). West African countries actively participated in the Non-Aligned Movement, using it as a platform to articulate collective interests and resist neocolonial domination. Quantitative indicators illustrate Africa's growing diplomatic footprint during this era. By the early 1970s, African states constituted over 25% of United Nations membership, significantly shaping voting blocs on decolonisation and racial justice resolutions (Mazrui, 1975). African leaders strategically engaged both Western and Eastern blocs to secure development assistance, military support, and ideological recognition without relinquishing sovereignty. This strategic engagement complicates portrayals of Africa as merely a Cold War battleground. In comparative perspective, Africa's Cold War experience differed from that of Latin America and Southeast Asia, where ideological alignment often resulted in prolonged proxy conflicts (Westad, 2005). In West Africa, while coups and instability occurred, transnational solidarities and diplomatic activism persisted, reinforcing Africa's role as a normative rather than purely military actor in global politics. In sum, the post-independence decades of the 1960s–1970s constituted a decisive moment of African transnational awakening. Through political leadership, intellectual and cultural exchange, and strategic Cold War engagement, West Africa and its diaspora articulated a global vision that challenged historical amnesia and affirmed Africa's agency in shaping twentieth-century world history.

4. Disruptions, Silencing, and Fragmentation (1980s–1990s)

The 1980s–1990s marked a period of profound disruption in Africa's transnational trajectory, characterised by economic crisis, ideological realignment, and narrative silencing (Cooper, 2002). While the post-independence decades had fostered expansive Pan-African networks, the late twentieth century witnessed a fragmentation of these connections, driven largely by structural adjustment, shifting global media discourses, and changing patterns of diaspora engagement.

4.1 Structural Adjustment and Neoliberal Restructuring

Economists and political scientists define Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) as policy packages imposed primarily by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, emphasising fiscal austerity, privatisation, trade liberalisation, and reduced state spending as conditions for financial assistance (World Bank, 1981). Across West Africa, SAPs reshaped political economies and reconfigured state–society relations. Scholars argue that these reforms significantly weakened African intellectual and political networks by dismantling institutions that had previously supported Pan-African collaboration, such as public universities, cultural centres, and state-funded research bodies (Mkandawire, 2001). Statistical evidence illustrates the scale of this transformation. By the mid-1990s, over 30 Sub-Saharan African countries were undergoing structural adjustment, with public expenditure on education declining by up to 25% in some West African states (UNESCO, 1998). These cuts triggered academic brain drain, as

scholars and professionals migrated to Europe and North America in search of stable employment. While this migration sustained people-centred transnationalism, it simultaneously eroded locally anchored intellectual communities that had underpinned earlier Pan-African projects (Zezeza, 2009). Scholars further contend that neoliberal restructuring undermined state-supported Pan-Africanism, as governments prioritised economic survival over continental or diasporic solidarity (Bond, 2006). Regional initiatives lost funding and political momentum, contributing to a shift from collective ideological visions to technocratic governance. In contrast to earlier decades, Africa's transnational engagement became increasingly informal, individualised, and economically driven.

4.2 Media Narratives and the Construction of Crisis

Media scholars define Afro-pessimism as a dominant representational framework that depicts Africa as inherently crisis-prone, violent, and incapable of self-governance (Hawk, 1992). During the 1980s–1990s, Western media coverage increasingly framed Africa through famine, debt, war, and disease, marginalising stories of resilience, innovation, and transnational agency. Scholars argue that this narrative shift reinforced historical amnesia by severing contemporary African realities from the emancipatory histories of the independence era (Mbembe, 2001). Empirical analyses of media content demonstrate this imbalance. Hawk (1992) documents that over 70% of Africa-related news stories in major Western outlets during the late Cold War focused on conflict and humanitarian disaster. Such portrayals obscured Africa's continued diplomatic activism and cultural production, consolidating a crisis ontology that shaped policy and public perception alike. Development discourses further reinforced this framing by reducing African societies to aid recipients rather than global contributors (Escobar, 1995). Comparatively, scholars note that similar economic crises in Latin America during the same period did not produce equivalent levels of cultural erasure, underscoring the racialised dimensions of Afro-pessimism (Mudimbe, 1988). The cumulative effect was a depoliticisation of African transnationalism, rendering earlier solidarities invisible within global consciousness.

4.3 Diaspora Disconnection and Reconfiguration

Sociologists define diaspora disconnection as the weakening of formal and ideological ties between migrant communities and their homelands, often accompanied by the emergence of new forms of engagement shaped by host-society conditions (Vertovec, 2009). During the 1980s–1990s, African diasporas underwent significant reconfiguration. Political exile and economic migration increased, but collective Pan-African activism gave way to more fragmented identity politics centred on nationality, ethnicity, or race (Zezeza, 2009). Quantitative data reflect this shift. While African migration to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries increased steadily from approximately 2.7 million in 1980 to over 6 million by 2000 diaspora political engagement became less institutionally coordinated (OECD, 2001). Remittances, though growing, were largely private and familial rather than overtly political. Scholars argue that this transformation did not signify disengagement but rather adaptation to new global realities (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). The emergence of new identity politics, particularly among second-generation Africans and Afro-descendants, redefined diaspora engagement. Cultural movements in music, fashion, and literature sustained transnational

connections, albeit in less explicitly political forms (Gilroy, 1993). These developments complicate simplistic narratives of decline by revealing continuity beneath fragmentation. In synthesis, the 1980s–1990s represent a period of disruption rather than disappearance in Africa’s transnational history. Structural adjustment weakened institutional Pan-Africanism, media narratives entrenched Afro-pessimism, and diaspora engagement was reconfigured rather than extinguished. Understanding this era is crucial for challenging historical amnesia and contextualising the renewed transnational reawakening that would emerge in the twenty-first century.

5. Reawakening and Reconnection in the Global Era (2000s–2010s)

The 2000s–2010s is a period of transnational reawakening, marked by technological transformation, cultural resurgence, and renewed political–economic engagement between Africa and its diaspora (Zezeza, 2010). Unlike earlier eras shaped by state-led Pan-Africanism or neoliberal fragmentation, this phase has been driven largely by digital connectivity, cultural soft power, and hybrid forms of institutional and grassroots mobilisation. Together, these dynamics have contributed to the partial reversal of historical amnesia by restoring Africa’s visibility and agency within global narratives.

5.1 Digital Transnationalism

Digital transnationalism is the use of digital technologies to sustain cross-border social, political, and cultural connections that transcend physical migration and state boundaries (Vertovec, 2009). In the African context, the rapid expansion of internet access and social media platforms during the 2000s fundamentally altered the terrain of diaspora engagement. Data from the International Telecommunication Union indicate that internet penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa increased from less than 2% in 2000 to over 25% by 2019, enabling unprecedented levels of communication between Africa and its diaspora (ITU, 2020). Scholars argue that digital platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and blogs have functioned as spaces of memory reclamation, allowing African and diasporic actors to contest colonial archives and dominant media representations (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019). Digital archives, podcasts, and online journals have revived suppressed histories of Pan-Africanism, anti-colonial struggle, and Black internationalism, thereby challenging historical amnesia. Moreover, new forms of diasporic mobilisation emerged through hashtag activism, crowdfunding, and online advocacy, linking local struggles to global audiences. Movements such as #EndSARS and transnational Black Lives Matter solidarities exemplify how digital infrastructures have reactivated people-centred transnationalism beyond formal institutions (Mutsvauro et al., 2021).

5.2 Cultural Renaissance and Soft Power

Political theorists define soft power as the ability to shape preferences and influence global audiences through culture, values, and ideas rather than coercion or material force (Nye, 2004). During the 2000s–2010s, Africa experienced a cultural renaissance that significantly enhanced its global soft power. Scholars highlight the global diffusion of African music genres such as Afrobeats, which gained mainstream recognition in Europe and North America through artists

like Burna Boy and Wizkid (Shiple, 2013). By the late 2010s, Afrobeats streams numbered in the billions annually on global platforms, underscoring Africa's reintegration into global cultural markets (IFPI, 2019). Similarly, African cinema particularly Nigeria's Nollywood emerged as one of the world's largest film industries by volume, producing over 2,000 films annually and contributing an estimated US\$7 billion to Nigeria's economy (UNESCO, 2021). Scholars argue that Nollywood's transnational circulation among African and diaspora audiences has reshaped representations of African life, moving beyond crisis-driven narratives to everyday experiences, aspirations, and contradictions (Haynes, 2016). Fashion, literature, and visual arts further reinforced this cultural visibility, with African designers and writers gaining prominence in global markets and literary prizes. Comparatively, this cultural resurgence parallels earlier intellectual circuits of the 1960s but differs in scale and accessibility due to digital mediation. Culture thus became a primary vehicle through which Africa re-entered global imaginaries as a producer of meaning rather than a site of deficiency (Mbembe, 2017).

5.3 Political and Economic Re-engagement

Economists define diaspora remittances as financial transfers sent by migrants to their countries of origin, which function as both household support mechanisms and macroeconomic stabilisers (World Bank, 2020). During the 2000s–2010s, remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa increased dramatically, rising from approximately US\$8 billion in 2000 to over US\$54 billion by 2019 (World Bank, 2020). In countries such as Nigeria and Ghana, remittances exceeded foreign direct investment and official development assistance, underscoring the material significance of diaspora engagement. Beyond remittances, scholars note growing diaspora investment in technology hubs, real estate, and social enterprises, reflecting a shift from survival-oriented transfers to developmental and entrepreneurial engagement (Newland & Tanaka, 2010). Politically, African states and regional organisations renewed efforts to institutionalise diaspora relations. The African Union's designation of the diaspora as the "sixth region of Africa" symbolised a formal recognition of transnational African belonging (African Union, 2003). Initiatives such as ECOWAS free movement protocols and diaspora bonds further institutionalised these connections. In comparative terms, Africa's re-engagement contrasts with the relative marginalisation of diasporas in earlier neoliberal decades, indicating a partial revival of Pan-African ideals under new global conditions. While inequalities and exclusions persist, the 2000s–2010s demonstrate that Africa's transnational networks have adapted rather than disappeared. In synthesis, the global era witnessed a multifaceted reawakening of African transnationalism. Through digital connectivity, cultural soft power, and renewed political-economic engagement, Africa and its diaspora reasserted their interconnectedness and global relevance. This period marks a critical departure from Afro-pessimist narratives, offering a contemporary counterpoint to historical amnesia and reaffirming Africa's role as an active participant in shaping twenty-first-century global culture and politics.

6. Critical Synthesis: Shattering Historical Amnesia

Scholars conceptualise historical amnesia as the patterned erasure or marginalisation of particular pasts from dominant knowledge systems, often through selective narration, archival silences, and disciplinary boundaries (Trouillot, 1995). Synthesising the literature across the

post-independence era, neoliberal decades, and the contemporary global period reveals that Africa's transnational history is best understood not as a linear rise-and-fall narrative, but as a cyclical process shaped by resistance, erasure, and renewal (Mbembe, 2001). This critical synthesis integrates these temporal layers to demonstrate how African and diasporic actors have continually reasserted agency despite shifting global constraints.

6.1 Patterns and Continuities across Decades

Historians consistently identify resistance as a defining continuity in Africa's transnational engagements, beginning with Pan-African anti-colonial solidarities of the 1960s and extending into digital activism in the 2010s (Adi, 2018; Mutsvauro et al., 2021). While the forms of mobilisation have changed from state-led diplomacy to people-centred digital networks the underlying commitment to global Black solidarity has endured. Scholars further observe recurring processes of erasure, particularly during periods of economic crisis and geopolitical marginalisation, when Africa's global role is reframed through deficit-oriented lenses (Mudimbe, 1988). Yet these moments of silencing have repeatedly been followed by renewal, as evidenced by the resurgence of diasporic cultural production and political engagement in the twenty-first century (Zezeza, 2010). Comparative data reinforce this pattern. For instance, while official development assistance to Africa stagnated during the 1980s–1990s, diaspora remittances expanded significantly in the 2000s, reaching over US\$54 billion by 2019 and providing an alternative channel of transnational connection and influence (World Bank, 2020). Such evidence challenges narratives of discontinuity by demonstrating how African transnationalism adapts rather than disappears.

6.2 Tensions and Contradictions

Scholars emphasise that Africa's transnational reawakening is marked by persistent tensions and contradictions. One key tension lies between elite-driven and grassroots transnationalism. Elite-driven transnationalism, exemplified by Pan-African summits and state-led diaspora initiatives, often prioritises symbolic unity and diplomatic visibility (African Union, 2003). In contrast, grassroots transnationalism operates through informal networks of migrants, artists, activists, and digital communities, frequently addressing everyday economic and social challenges (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). While elite initiatives offer institutional legitimacy, scholars argue they risk reproducing exclusion by privileging educated or economically successful diasporas. Another central contradiction exists between symbolic unity and material inequality. Cultural renaissance and soft power have enhanced Africa's global visibility, yet material disparities within and between African and diasporic communities persist (Mbembe, 2017). For example, while African creative industries have generated billions in global revenue, wealth distribution remains highly uneven, and structural inequalities shaped by race, class, and migration status endure (UNESCO, 2021). These contradictions complicate celebratory narratives of reawakening and underscore the need for critical engagement rather than romanticisation.

6.3 Implications for Knowledge Production

Confronting historical amnesia necessitates the decolonisation of African and diaspora historiography, defined as the dismantling of Eurocentric epistemologies that position Africa as peripheral to global modernity (Quijano, 2000). This requires integrating African and diasporic histories into shared analytical frameworks rather than treating them as separate fields. The literature reviewed demonstrates that Africa has consistently shaped global political thought, culture, and resistance movements, even when such contributions were obscured or devalued (Gilroy, 1993). Rethinking Africa's place in global history therefore involves reframing Africa not as an object of global processes but as a co-producer of global modernity (Mbembe, 2001). This shift has implications beyond academia, influencing how policymakers, international institutions, and cultural industries engage with Africa and its diaspora. By synthesising evidence across decades, this review illustrates that Africa's transnational reawakening is neither episodic nor derivative, but a constitutive element of global historical change. In sum, shattering historical amnesia requires sustained attention to patterns of continuity, critical examination of internal tensions, and a reorientation of knowledge production. Such an approach not only restores Africa's transnational past but also redefines its present and future place in the world.

Implications and Future Directions

Reframing Africa's transnational reawakening carries significant implications for both African Studies and International Relations (IR), as it directly challenges epistemological and methodological assumptions that have historically marginalised African agency (Quijano, 2000; Mbembe, 2001). By foregrounding long-term transnational continuities, this review disrupts Eurocentric periodisation, which often treats African history as episodic, defined by colonialism, crisis, or external intervention rather than as an active contributor to global historical processes (Mudimbe, 1988). Reframing Africa through a transnational lens reveals that African political thought, cultural production, and diasporic mobilisation have consistently shaped global modernity, thereby necessitating revisions to mainstream IR theories that privilege material power and Western state trajectories (Acharya, 2014). This perspective further reframes Africa as an ideational and cultural power, defined as the capacity to influence global norms, identities, and imaginaries through ideas, values, and symbolic production rather than military or economic dominance (Nye, 2004). Evidence from the global diffusion of African music, film, and literature during the 2000s–2010s demonstrates that Africa exercises substantial soft power, even amid persistent structural economic inequalities (UNESCO, 2021). Recognising this ideational influence compels IR scholarship to integrate culture, memory, and diaspora networks into analyses of global power relations, moving beyond narrow state-centric models. The findings also carry important policy and practice implications. Policymakers increasingly acknowledge the strategic importance of diaspora engagement, defined as deliberate efforts by states and institutions to mobilise the skills, capital, and networks of citizens abroad (Newland & Tanaka, 2010). Empirical data show that diaspora remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa exceeded US\$54 billion by 2019, surpassing official development assistance in several West African countries (World Bank, 2020). These flows underscore the need for policies that move beyond remittance reliance toward structured diaspora investment, political inclusion, and knowledge exchange. Initiatives such as diaspora bonds, dual citizenship frameworks, and voting rights for overseas

citizens offer pathways for strengthening transnational governance. Cultural diplomacy and regional leadership further emerge as important tools for advancing Africa's global influence (Cooper, 2014). Cultural industries including music, film, fashion, and literature provide platforms through which African states and regional bodies can project narratives of creativity, resilience, and innovation. The African Union's recognition of the diaspora as the "sixth region of Africa" illustrates an institutional effort to translate symbolic Pan-Africanism into policy-relevant frameworks (African Union, 2003), although such initiatives must address internal inequalities to avoid reproducing elite-driven models of transnationalism. Looking forward, several future research directions emerge. Comparative regional studies examining transnational African experiences beyond West Africa, including East and Southern Africa, are needed to identify similarities and divergences in diaspora engagement and cultural production (Zezeza, 2010). Quantitative mapping of transnational networks, using social network analysis, migration data, and digital trace methods, offers opportunities to empirically capture the scale and structure of African global connections (Vertovec, 2009). In addition, gendered perspectives that foreground women's roles in sustaining transnational households, cultural economies, and political movements remain essential, given their continued underrepresentation in dominant historiographies (Mama, 1997). In sum, the implications of this review extend beyond historical reconstruction to contemporary theory, policy, and research practice. By reframing Africa as a transnational, ideational, and cultural power, this synthesis contributes to the decolonisation of knowledge production and opens new pathways for understanding Africa's enduring role in shaping global history and governance.

Conclusion

Africa's post-independence history cannot be adequately understood through isolated national narratives or crisis-centred frameworks alone (Cooper, 2002). This narrative review synthesises interdisciplinary scholarship to show that from the 1960s to the 2010s, West Africa and its diaspora were connected through enduring transnational political, intellectual, cultural, and economic networks. The analysis highlights how early Pan-African solidarities, subsequent neoliberal disruptions, and contemporary digital and cultural reawakening form a continuous, though uneven, historical arc rather than discrete or disconnected episodes. The evidence reviewed reaffirms Africa's transnational agency, defined as the capacity of African and diasporic actors to shape global ideas, identities, and material flows beyond territorial boundaries (Gilroy, 1993; Zezeza, 2010). Despite periods of silencing and marginalisation, this agency persisted through people-centred transnationalism, diaspora remittances, cultural production, and ideational influence. Statistical indicators such as the sustained growth of diaspora remittances and the global reach of African cultural industries underscore that Africa has remained an active participant in global systems, even when its contributions were rendered invisible by dominant narratives (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Finally, confronting historical amnesia emerges as a question of memory, identity, and global belonging. Reclaiming Africa's transnational past challenges Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies and repositions Africa as a co-producer of global modernity rather than its periphery (Mbembe, 2001). By integrating African and diaspora histories within a shared analytical framework, this study contributes to the decolonisation of knowledge production and offers a more inclusive understanding of Africa's place in the world, one grounded in connection, creativity, and continuity rather than absence or failure.

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