Pan-Africanism since Decolonization: From the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU)

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Résumé

Cet article présente une analyse critique de la mise en œuvre de l’idéal panafricaniste après la décolonisation par les institutions créées à cette fin par les États africains, notamment l’Organisation de l’unité africaine (OUA) et l’Union africaine (UA). Comme idéologie d’indépendance et de développement, le panafricanisme avait comme projet de société une Afrique indépendante et prospère dans le cadre des États jouissant d’une autodétermination intégrale au niveau politique, ainsi que des économies émergentes basées sur l’énorme richesse naturelle du continent et la solidarité panafricaine. L’unique grande réalisation de cette vision est sans aucun doute la réussite de l’OUA dans l’élimination complète du colonialisme européen et du pouvoir raciste des minorités blanches en Afrique. Quant à l’intégration économique et politique ainsi que le bien-être de la population, les États et les organisations panafricaines sont loin de rencontrer les aspirations des peuples africains pour la paix, la démocratie et le progrès social. Aussi longtemps qu’elle reflète le caractère social des États qui la composent et dont la majorité est constituée par des leaders autoritaires qui s’accrochent au pouvoir par force ou par fraude électorale, l’UA sera incapable de répondre à ces aspirations populaires.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism; Decolonization; Organization of African Unity; African Union; Conflict Resolution; Regional Economic Communities
Introduction

As the replacement of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), established in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on May 25, 1963, the African Union (AU) is now half-a-century old. Amid the celebrations of these first fifty years of its existence, the AU needs to take stock of its strengths and weaknesses as an intergovernmental organization designed to promote the pan-African agenda politically and economically. As articulated by the leading figures of pan-Africanism as a political movement, that agenda consisted of a three-dimensional project of political self-determination, economic self-reliance, and pan-African solidarity in the promotion and defense of African interests nationally and internationally.

The OAU came into existence as a compromise between the radical pan-Africanism of leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, who advocated a union government and a continental military high command, and the more conservative outlook of pro-Western leaders of Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia, who insisted on a gradual approach to African economic and political integration. Despite the antagonistic positions separating them, the two groups were both favorable to the idea of setting up a pan-African institution based on the principles of state sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, and the inviolability of national boundaries. Within the global context of the cold war, the more limited goals of the OAU were (1) the struggle for the total independence of Africa from colonialism and white settler rule; (2) the peaceful resolution of interstate conflicts through negotiation, mediation and conciliation; and (3) greater solidarity and economic cooperation among African states.

In this regard, decolonization and majority rule, particularly in the colonial-settler states of Algeria, Kenya and Southern Africa where racism was institutionalized, were a major achievement of the pan-African project. The culminating event in this process was the liberation of South Africa from apartheid in 1994, ending 82 years of an internal struggle led by the African National Congress (ANC) and 31 years of sustained and collective support by the African continent through the OAU. This unswerving opposition to white minority rule and colonialism in all its forms is undoubtedly the greatest achievement of the OAU. The pan-African organization succeeded in mobilizing African and world public opinion against die-hard colonialists in the Portuguese colonies and in the settler states of Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The worldwide isolation of the apartheid state of South Africa, including its exclusion from important international organizations and sporting events such as the Olympic Games, was spearheaded by the OAU. And the OAU African Liberation Committee (ALC) deserves praise for the outstanding work it did in supporting the armed struggle in Guinea-Bissau and Southern Africa.

Countries such as Guinea, Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe also made great sacrifices in supporting this struggle for the total liberation of the African continent from colonial oppression.

The OAU did have some positive achievements in the area of conflict resolution, particularly with respect to mediation in border disputes, the major area of interstate conflict in Africa. However, most of the armed conflicts in Africa since independence have been internal rather than interstate.
As a pan-African organization, the OAU did have an obligation to address such conflicts, inasmuch as they involved gross violations of human rights, including cases of genocide, and had a humanitarian dimension in the large number of refugees and internally displaced persons that they generated.

Unfortunately, the OAU failed to exercise its pan-African right of intervention in cases of state-sponsored terrorism and heinous crimes, including ethnic cleansing and genocide. The organization expressed little or no solidarity with Africans facing mortal danger from their own governments and never recognized the legitimacy of African struggles against African tyrants. In 1979, when President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania took the courageous decision to pursue invading Ugandan troops all the way to Kampala and assist Ugandan patriots in overthrowing the murderous regime of Idi Amin Dada, he found very little support among his African peers.

Things did begin to change for the better in the 1990s, particularly with the adoption in 1993 in Cairo of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, which gave the organization a role to play in internal conflicts. Since replacing the OAU in January 2002, the AU has increased its role in internal conflicts as part of the pan-African right of intervention in domestic affairs. Both the AU Commission and the regional economic communities (RECs) have played a useful role in this regard, by sending peacekeeping forces to countries in turmoil. In fact, the RECs seem to be playing a greater role with respect to resolving internal conflicts than in promoting economic cooperation and integration.

A major issue confronting the AU and the RECs is the problem of resources. With so much dependence on the European Union and other external funding, questions arise as to the African ownership and initiative in some of the theaters of intervention. In addition to the lack of political will by governments, the lack of adequate resources for peace and security as well as the economic cooperation projects has to do with individual countries’ membership in multiple regional institutions. For it is not uncommon to have a country belong to three or more regional economic groupings. By spreading themselves thin in terms of resources, both personnel and financial, African countries end up depriving these institutions of the skills and money they need to carry out their activities successfully.

This raises the question of how strongly the current leadership in Africa is committed to the whole process of economic and political integration. This question is at the heart of the future prospects for the AU. As an organization that reflects the social character of the states composing it, most of which are under authoritarian rulers who cling to power through force and electoral fraud, it is ill-equipped to meet the people’s aspirations for democracy and social progress. Moreover, its neoliberal development program of NEPAD is less suited to the needs of African workers and peasants than the more comprehensive development strategy of the Lagos Plan of Action, which was adopted in 1980 by the OAU, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB).
Background to the OAU and AU: The Pan-African Movement

Pan-Africanism as an intellectual idea and a political project had been advocated long before the pan-African movement of the twentieth century. It was born in the African diaspora of North America and the Caribbean, where people of African descent found emotional and intellectual satisfaction in identifying with the African continent as a whole. Being for the most part ignorant of their real areas of origin, descendants of enslaved Africans embraced the idea of the continent in its fullness as ‘Mother Africa’. Thus, already during the nineteenth century, prominent black intellectuals like Martin Delaney, Alexander Crummell, Edward Wilmot Blyden, and Henry McNeal Turner began formulating pan-African ideas. These were generally a reaction to slavery and racial segregation and the denial of African humanity and history by the white world. In this regard, a major attempt to refute Eurocentric and racist views of Africa was W.E.B. Du Bois’s 1915 book entitled The Negro, which David Levering Lewis describes as “a large building block in an Afrocentric historiography that has achieved credibility through the writings of scholars such as Basil Davidson, Martin Bernal, and Cheikh Anta Diop” (Lewis 1993:462). This reclaiming of Africa’s ancient glory in a brilliant synthesis of scholarly research on black civilizations was so impressive that in 1922, William Leo Hansberry made The Negro a key textbook in one of his history classes at Howard University in Washington, D.C. According to historians John Parker and Richard Rathbone, this was ‘the first appearance of African history in a university curriculum’ anywhere in the world (Parker and Rathbone 2007:36).

The role of scholarship in elucidating the African past and thus nurturing the rise to self-assertion of the peoples of African descent worldwide – an endeavor to which Carter G. Woodson also made an outstanding contribution through the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History – was complemented by similar efforts in religion (black independent churches), education (self-help school projects), political mobilization, and other fields.

Consequently, the leading principles and slogans of pan-Africanism in its different manifestations were already evident in earlier writings on black pride and self-determination. According to George Shepperson, Delaney and Blyden appear to have been the first persons to use the ‘magnetic slogan’ of ‘Africa for the Africans’ (Shepperson 1960:301). Likewise, Delaney was the first African American leader to promote the ‘Back-to-Africa’ dream, an idea for which Bishop Turner became the major exponent up to the First World War, and Marcus Garvey the drum major from then on through his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). John Edward Bruce (1856-1924), a New York journalist who joined Arthur Schomburg in establishing the Negro Society for Historical Research in 1911, captured the ideas of négritude and the ‘African personality’ in an article in which he proclaimed that he was ‘black all over, and proud of my beautiful black skin’ (Shepperson 1960:310).

These and other pan-African ideas laid the groundwork for pan-Africanism as a political movement, which emerged in earnest in 1900, when the West Indian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams convened a pan-African conference in London for purposes of promoting unity among all peoples of African descent. Held at Westminster Hall from July 23 to 25, the conference was chaired by Bishop Alexander Walters of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and concluded its deliberations with an ‘Address to the Nations of the World’ drafted by W.E.B. Du Bois. Between 1919 and 1945, Du Bois as principal organizer or mentor of the first five pan-African congresses, spearheaded the pan-African movement.
Note should be taken of the fact that both the first and last of these congresses took place in the wake of the two world wars, each of which had raised significant questions about Africa’s place and role in the contemporary world.

Just as African American veterans of the U.S. civil war had been energized by their role in the Union victory to fight for political and social equality, the participation of black Africans and black Americans in World War I against Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy undermined white supremacy and gave an added impetus to the fight for racial equality. Already a major participant in this struggle in the United States as a member of the Niagara Movement and a founder and a major official of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in his capacity as editor of *The Crisis*, Du Bois saw the fight against white supremacy as a worldwide undertaking. He had come to this conclusion on the basis of two important hypotheses. The first hypothesis is his well-known statement that ‘the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line’ (Du Bois 1903:vii).

On the basis of the archives of the 1900 Pan-African Conference, Shepperson provides an interesting comment on the pan-African origin of this famous statement:

*It was at the 1900 Pan-African Conference, in a memorial which he drafted to be sent ‘to the sovereigns in whose realms are subjects of African descent,’ that Du Bois first made the statement that ‘The problem of the Twentieth Century is the color line’ – those famous words which, three years later, headed his influential book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. It is important to remember that this often-quoted slogan started out not in the opening paragraph to his first notable book but at the time of Du Bois’s introduction to Pan-Africanism (Shepperson 1960: 306 - 307).*

The second hypothesis, which is contained in his May 1915 *Atlantic Monthly* article on ‘The African Roots of War,’ is that World War I resulted in part from the competition for natural resources and markets, which had been fueled by the European Scramble for Africa. Here again, Shepperson is very helpful in pointing out how Du Bois’s analysis anticipates the more widely known thesis by V.I. Lenin on the colonial origins of the War in his book *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and adds that Du Bois ‘even uses the term ‘aristocracy of labor’ which is often considered to be Lenin’s invention’ (Shepperson 1960:307). More important for our analysis is the point made by Elliott P. Skinner that Du Bois ‘was convinced that the future of Africa was one of the most important questions to be answered after the war’ (Skinner 1992:393); and ‘did not appear to hesitate having the NAACP make the Pan-African movement a regular part of its program’ (Skinner 1992:399).

**Du Bois and the Pan-African Congresses**

It was therefore fitting that the First Pan-African Congress should be held in the wake of World War I in Paris, site of the Versailles or Paris Peace Conference, where the victors were to determine the shape of the postwar world. Now that NGO forums have become a regular occurrence whenever major international summits or conferences take place to make critical decisions concerning the world, it is worth remembering that the first most important parallel forum involving non-state actors at the venue of a major world event was the First Pan-African Congress.
This momentous gathering was held at the Grand Hotel in Paris between February 19 and 21, 1919 for purposes of pressuring delegates at the Versailles Conference to include African concerns in their deliberations concerning the shape of the postwar world.

Du Bois was the planner and chief strategist for this novel project in international diplomacy. Given the openly racist positions of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and the reluctance of both France and Britain to have a meeting that would discuss the issue of self-determination for Africans, the congress would not have seen the day without the intervention of Blaise Diagne, a Senegalese member of the French National Assembly and a high-ranking official in the French government, who prevailed upon his political ally Georges Clémenceau, the French prime minister, to authorize the meeting. An otherwise unabashed apologist for French colonialism, Diagne regarded Du Bois as a lesser threat than Marcus Mosiah Garvey, leader of the mass-based UNIA, a grassroots pan-African organization (Benot 1989:17; Dieng 1990:130-132).

Thanks to Du Bois’s organizational skills and Diagne’s political clout, the congress was able to meet with Diagne as president and Du Bois as secretary. Its fifty-seven delegates represented fifteen countries, but more than half of them were from the United States (16) and the Caribbean (7 Haitians and 7 from French West Indies). Representatives from the African continent included one each from Algeria, the Belgian Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Portuguese Africa, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Spanish Africa. The largest number of African delegates came from the 7 black members of the French Parliament, who were led by Diagne. Many of the delegates at the congress were public officials, some of whom represented their countries at the Paris Peace Conference as well. These included Charles D.B. King, the secretary of state and future president of Liberia, and representatives of the governments of Ethiopia and Haiti. In spite of this official presence, the congress retained its character as a non-governmental forum designed to influence the Paris Peace Conference with alternative policy recommendations and, hopefully, to enter into a fruitful dialogue with it. This is what Du Bois had planned to achieve, but he did not succeed in personally presenting the resolutions of the congress to the official forum. The latter’s reluctance to enter into dialogue with the congress was based on the great powers’ disdain for the whole pan-African exercise rather than on account of the decisions taken by the congress. As Maurice Delafosse, a French colonial administrator and a scholar who attended the sessions at the Grand Hotel wrote in a report for a colonial affairs newsletter, there was nothing that countries like France that already had black members in its parliament could find as threatening in the mostly mild recommendations on political reforms in the colonies (Hargreaves 1968:233-241). As far as he was concerned, according to John Hargreaves, the First Pan-African Congress gave the impression that ‘the anti-American edge of the movement was actually much sharper than the anti-colonial one’ (Hargreaves 1968:241). For Du Bois’s elitism, upper-class affinities, and gradualist approaches to the ‘advancement’ of colonial subjects in Africa was not much different from the patronizing attitudes of enlightened circles in Britain, France, and Portugal before the demise of democracy in 1926.

With few exceptions, and particularly the radical tone of the 1921 London declaration that Blaise Diagne refused to endorse for its supposedly ‘communist’, ‘separatist’ or ‘radical’ tendencies (Benot 1989:26), this conclusion is applicable to the second, third and fourth pan-African congresses, which were held in 1921 (London, Brussels and Paris), 1923 (London and Lisbon), and 1927 (New York), respectively.
Although they did not have the drama and the symbolic impact of the first congress, they continued to build what Lewis refers to as ‘Du Boisian pan-Africanism,’ which he summarizes as follows:

*In much the same way that the editor and his Talented Tenth loyalists tended to harbor doubts about the civic maturity of the mass of poor, undereducated black people in the United States, so he and they were inclined to concede European arguments that not only were all Africans not equal but that few of them would be ready to rule themselves in the near future. ... Upper-class in structure and piecemeal in agenda, Du Boisian pan-Africanism nevertheless professed fidelity to the spirit of liberal democracy and, therefore, in contrast to its UNIA rival, disdain for Caesarism and racial chauvinism (Lewis 2000:114).*

Thus, while agreeing with Du Bois on the need for liberal democracy but one with universal suffrage, prominent African pan-Africanists were genuine admirers of Marcus Garvey and of his vision of an Africa under African control. This applies to Nkrumah as well. Citing Nkrumah’s autobiography, Shepperson (1960:303) writes that

*Kwame Nkrumah has stated unequivocally that the Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey influenced him more than anything else during his period in America. And Garvey’s pride of colour, through his organ, The Negro World, reached out into West Africa, its independent church and nationalist movements, into South and Central Africa, where it had some effect on the followers of Clements Kadalie of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa and the remains of the Nyasaland Chilembwe-ite movement and into the messianic nationalism of the Kimbangu movement in the Congo.*

Paul Panda Farnana, the Belgian Congo delegate at the first and second pan-African congresses, was one of these Garvey admirers in Central Africa. A Congolese who had served in both the Belgian colonial service and the Belgian army, he had been made prisoner of war by the Germans during World War I. Inspired by the Paris Congress, Panda went on to found the Union Congolaise (UC, or Congolese Union) on August 30, 1919 in Brussels, an organization devoted to ‘relief and the moral and intellectual development of the Congolese race’ (Bontinck 1980:597, citing the UC objectives). According to Bontinck (1980:598), the expression ‘moral and intellectual development’ of the race was apparently inspired by the word ‘advancement’ in the name of the organization that had sponsored the congress, the NAACP. Begun with thirty-three members, almost all of them Congolese war veterans residing in Belgium, the UC created branches in several Belgian cities. Panda became the first Congolese nationalist leader and a major critic of Belgian occupation of the Congo and the looting of Congolese art by Europeans (Bontinck 1980:608).

Consistent with the ‘back-to-Africa’ and self-reliance ideas promoted by Garvey, Panda returned to the Congo in May 1929 to help uplift the masses, and set up a school and a chapel in his home village of Nzembe, close to the Atlantic Ocean. Unfortunately, he died there a year later on May 12, 1930, at the age of 42.
The Fifth Pan-African Congress and Decolonization

If the intellectual pioneers of pan-Africanism had emerged from the African diaspora of North America and the Caribbean, the realization of the pan-African dream of “Africa for the Africans” was to be the work of continental Africans. The torch was passed from the first group to the second in 1945 at the Fifth Pan-African Congress held from October 15 to 21 in Manchester, England.

This is a gathering that Francis Kwame Nkrumah of the Gold Coast and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya helped organize under the leadership of George Padmore. The symbolic passing of the torch took place on the morning of the third day, Tuesday, October 17. Padmore had presented the gavel to Du Bois to chair the session as president of the congress. The old man passed it on to Nkrumah, the rapporteur for the session. As Lewis (2000:513-514) points out, ‘only a clairvoyant could have appreciated the momentous import’ of this transfer of leadership from the ‘father of Pan-Africanism’ to the first president of Ghana, the first black majority country to gain independence in Africa.³

In addition to Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, participants from Africa at the Manchester Conference included Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Jaja Wachuku of Nigeria; Dr. Hastings Banda from Nyasaland (Malawi); Isaac T.A. Wallace-Johnson of Sierra Leone; and Peter Abrahams of South Africa (Abrahams 2000:47). The call went forth that each African present should return home and lead the struggle for independence. Nearly all of the Africans at the congress heeded the call. Nkrumah, Azikiwe, Kenyatta and Banda eventually became presidents of their respective countries, while Awolowo and Wachuku would hold important political positions in Nigeria.⁶ Wallace-Johnson was already a major political figure in Sierra Leone. As for Abrahams, a seaman who got involved in the pan-African movement in wartime Britain and post-war France to become a writer, he went on to find sanctuary from apartheid South Africa in the Caribbean island of Jamaica in 1955. He relates the story of his political odyssey in The Coyaba Chronicles.

Until 1945, pan-Africanism implied the vision of Africa as a single federal union. Nkrumah, a major figure at Manchester alongside Du Bois, Padmore and Kenyatta, remained committed to this idea throughout his political career, during which he worked tirelessly to convince other African leaders on the necessity of a ‘United States of Africa’ for peace and development in the continent (Nkrumah 1964).

In holding the first All-African Peoples Conference in Accra in December 1958, Nkrumah succeeded not only in spreading the message of Manchester to countries that had remained behind in the development of modern mass nationalism like the Belgian Congo and the Portuguese territories, but also in winning the North African countries to the pan-African cause.

Another major champion of the project was the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop, who envisaged a gradual process of building the political unity of the continent, beginning with Black Africa. He also elaborated a comprehensive plan for the industrialization of Africa based on the continent’s rich endowment in natural resources (Diop 1987). On the whole, a large consensus did emerge throughout Africa on the eve of decolonization that the total emancipation of Africa from colonialism and neocolonialism required the implementation of a national project of democracy and development through self-determination politically, self-reliance economically, and pan-African solidarity in all spheres.
Since this developmental vision is best achieved through continental or regional integration, I prefer to call it ‘the pan-African project.’ And pan-Africanism in deeds and not in words is a sine qua non for the successful implementation of the pan-African project.

On the basis of this background to pan-Africanism and its contribution to the decolonization of Africa, the remainder of this article looks at its strengths and weaknesses in postcolonial Africa. How have African states dealt with pan-Africanism as a vision of continental unity and development? What is the record of the continental organization established to promote and realize this vision during the first fifty years of its existence?

Answers to these and related questions will be examined through a critical analysis of the work of the OAU and its successor, the African Union.

In general, it can be said that the promotion of pan-Africanism in postcolonial Africa did get off to a bad start. For the ideal of pan-Africanism was undermined by both the neocolonial interests of imperialism, which preferred to deal with smaller states rather than larger and less manageable entities, and the narrow class interests of the African nationalist leaders, who stood a better chance of gaining presidential and ministerial positions in smaller entities. For example, French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa, the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi, as well as British East Africa, could have formed a total of four states instead of twenty! This breakup of administrative groupings that could have turned into larger nations with strong economies has had a negative impact on the ability of the postcolonial state to fulfill the people’s aspirations for democracy and social progress. As a new ruling class, the African petty bourgeoisie became more preoccupied with the stability of its poor, dependent and sometimes fragile state than with the interests of the people with whom it was in alliance during the struggle for independence.

Clinging to power and its attendant privileges became the religion of the new African oligarchy, instead of the pan-African project of self-determination, self-reliance and pan-African solidarity.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the OAU**

The balkanization of the African continent through the decolonization pact between the former colonial powers and the African elites resulted in over fifty states, most of which were too weak to fulfill the essential tasks of nation building and state building (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1993). The typical state has remained fragile because of its narrow class base, as it is representative of the new oligarchy rather than the majority of the population. Given this fragility and the erosion of the legitimacy that the nationalist elites had won during the struggle for independence, rulers became increasingly dependent on external support in order to cling to power. This was particularly true during the cold war, as rulers relied heavily on either the West or the East for their survival. Support mechanisms by each of the rival camps included military, economic, financial and ideological means.

The fragility of the new states was such that even the Bandung principle of ‘positive neutralism’ or nonalignment to which nearly all African states subscribed, would soon become an empty slogan, as the need to retain power required the protection of one or the other of the two antagonistic camps in the East-West conflict or the cold war.
In late 1960, the result for Africa was a major split over the Congo crisis, between those who supported genuine independence under the democratically elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, and those who were prepared to pursue a policy of appeasement with imperialism and the forces of counter-revolution in the Congo (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2014). The first group, led by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, became known as the Casablanca Bloc, following its January 1961 meeting in the Moroccan city under the auspices of King Mohamed V. It was strongly pro-Lumumba, anti-imperialist, and advocated a quicker pace of African political integration. Led by the pro-West leaders of Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia, the second group was eventually called the Monrovia Bloc. Made up of a large number of Anglophone and Francophone states, the Monrovia Bloc was generally soft on imperialism, and gave material and moral support to the moderate Congolese leaders who murdered Lumumba, and insisted on a gradualist approach to African economic and political integration.

Despite the antagonistic positions separating them, the two blocs were both favorable to the idea of setting up a pan-African institution, even if they differed on its vision and functions. Emperor Haile Salassie of Ethiopia succeeded in striking a compromise between the two groups, which met in May 1963 in Addis Ababa to create the OAU. Apparently, it was the Nigerian draft of the organization charter that served as the basis of discussion for the OAU Charter.8

Thus, while the Emperor made an effort to find common ground, it was the more conservative outlook of the Monrovia Bloc that was enshrined in the founding charter of the OAU.

Instead of a more radical and Nkrumahist vision of a Union government and a continental military high command, the OAU was established as an intergovernmental organization based on the principles of state sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, and the inviolability of national boundaries.9 If there is one area in which the OAU was definitely successful, it is in its relentless pursuit of the decolonization of the African continent. Not only did the OAU succeed in mobilizing world public opinion against Portugal for its ultra-colonialism in Africa and the colonial-settler regimes of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa for their racist autocracies; it spearheaded worldwide isolation of the apartheid state of South Africa, including its exclusion from international organizations and events. And the OAU African Liberation Committee did an outstanding job in providing both moral and material support to liberation movements engaged in the armed struggle in Guinea-Bissau and in Southern Africa.

Unfortunately, during much of the critical decade of the 1980s, only 18 of the 50 member states kept up with their payments for the work of the ALC. A similar pattern existed with respect to the overall OAU budget, as most members got used to accumulating huge arrears in the payment of their dues. The lack of resources was a major obstacle to the effectiveness of the OAU in implementing its goals. If the support to the fight against colonialism and apartheid was a major achievement of the OAU, pan-African solidarity was at best symbolic with respect to the civil rights movement in the United States, and nonexistent in the case of oppression and heinous crimes by African states against their own people.
The very presence of African diplomats and students in the United States did add pressure on the federal, state and municipal governments to desegregate public accommodations, just as racial segregation itself was more and more proving an embarrassment to a country that pretended to be the leader of the free world and number one defender of democracy and human rights. On the other hand, given the power imbalances in the world, there was little that African states and the OAU could do to punish the United States in a comparable way to what they did against apartheid South Africa. For example, when the brutal repression of a civil rights march at Selma, Alabama took place on Bloody Sunday (7 March 1965), less than four months after U.S.

Air Force planes had dropped Belgian paratroopers reportedly to rescue white hostages in Kisangani (then Stanleyville) in the Congo, some African intellectuals were wishfully thinking that if Black Africa, too, had sophisticated fighter planes and helicopters, it could have intervened to punish the oppressors of its kith and kin.

Efforts were made to maintain solidarity with the African diaspora in the Americas by holding the Sixth Pan-African Congress in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in 1974 and the Seventh Congress in Kampala in 1994.

Of the more than 600 people attending the Dar meeting, the largest delegation was from North America, with over 200 persons, and the overriding issue remained the pan-African support to the liberation struggle in Southern Africa.

Both of these congresses, and particularly the one in Kampala, were mired in the controversy involving disputes between Black nationalists and Arabs on the definition of pan-Africanism. Does the concept refer to race or to the continent, geographically defined?

With respect to solidarity with Africans facing mortal danger from their own governments in independent Africa, the OAU never recognized the right of African citizens to fight against dictatorship and tyranny by African rulers, as the case of Uganda under Idi Amin does illustrate. Thus, from its very beginning and in view of its cardinal principles of non-interference in internal affairs and the inviolability of colonially inherited boundaries, the OAU was no different from other intergovernmental organizations in the world with respect to peace and security. Governments were free to massacre their own citizens without any sanctions from the OAU and its member states, let alone a simple public denunciation of heinous crimes against humanity by other governments or the OAU Secretariat. An important change did take place in 1993, with the adoption in Cairo of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. The mechanism marked a departure from a religious commitment to non-interference in internal affairs by giving the organization the right to intervene in internal conflicts. However, the mechanism was too new, untested and non-operational to be activated in the face of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and its catastrophic repercussions in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 1996-97 and thereafter.

As for the promotion of greater solidarity and economic cooperation, the OAU did collaborate with the ECA and the AfDB in elaborating blueprints for African economic development such as the LPA and in supporting the capacity development of the RECs. In the context of the Abuja Treaty on African economic integration, the RECs are the main building blocks for the political and economic integration of Africa.
As pan-African institutions, they are as crucial to regional economic cooperation as they are part and parcel of the African security architecture. Unfortunately, and whether under the OAU or the AU, the RECs are intergovernmental organizations whose viability depends on the level of moral and material support from member states. As the 2012-2014 military intervention of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in the Central African Republic demonstrated, some of the RECs are more active in the area of peace and security than they are in economic cooperation and integration.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the African Union**

Established on May 26, 2001 in Addis Ababa, the African Union officially replaced the OAU on July 9, 2002 in Durban, South Africa. Most of AU objectives are very much similar to those of the OAU, but there is added emphasis on the political and economic integration of the continent, solidarity with the people, human rights, popular participation, and the promotion of democratic principles, institutions and governance. These objectives have not only been spelled out in the Constitutive Act of the Union and other documents, but are enforced in practice through zero tolerance with unconstitutional change of government. While there are limitations in this respect, particularly in cases of fraudulent elections and the usurpation of power by incumbents who are reluctant to leave office, the AU has condemned coups d’état and suspended the membership of states where illegal seizures of power have taken place.

Unfortunately, its electoral observers tend to be too quick in accepting official electoral results, even in areas where more impartial observers have serious reservations with the electoral process. Both the AU and the RECs have increased their participation in internal conflicts, by sending peacekeeping forces to countries in turmoil.

As pointed out above, too much dependence on external funding for these operations, as in other areas, raises the question of African ownership and initiative. I do suggest that the failure of AU members to provide the needed resources for their own activities is due to the lack of political will and/or the burden of multiple memberships in regional institutions. The DRC, for example, belongs to five of them: ECCAS, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the Economic Community of the Countries of the Great Lakes (CEPGL). Even if DRC authorities were really committed to paying their contributions to these organizations on a regular basis, something that they have not done in the last twenty-five years, the resources required for such payments are without doubt enormous for a country whose tax collection capacity is mediocre.

As long as African states continue to look to developed countries as major sources of development assistance, they will not succeed in building the capacity of their RECs to enhance regional economic cooperation and integration. Thirty-four years since its adoption in 1980, the *Lagos Plan of Action* remains the best strategy of economic development for Africa through self-reliance and pan-African solidarity. The LPA is an integrated strategy of development through improvements in industry, transportation and communications, human and natural resources development, and science and technology.
It has failed to take off the ground for three main reasons: (1) African inaction, (2) structural constraints, and (3) hostility from the West and the international financial institutions under its control, the IMF and the World Bank.

In the first place, African leaders have a habit of signing a lot of agreements to which they are not fully committed in practice. High in principle, economic integration has remained low with respect to the allocation of budget resources and the removal of bureaucratic restraints by African states on the freedom of movement of peoples, goods and services. In the second place, African economies are mainly export-oriented and dependent on the sale of raw materials to world markets. Intra-African trade, although substantial through the informal economy, is still a small percentage of national trade statistics, as it avoids not only registration but also taxation. In the third place, the Bretton Woods institutions continue to mislead African governments with useless strategies of “poverty reduction” that have not succeeded since the 1960s. Their hostility to the LPA was shown in 1981, when the World Bank responded to the latter with its own blueprint for African development, the Berg Report (World Bank 1981), so-called after the name of the coordinator of the group that wrote it, Professor Elliot Berg. This neoliberal blueprint proposes an agriculture-based and export-oriented economy, a vision that is diametrically opposed to, and undermines the autonomist and pan-African vision of the LPA.

Twenty years later, a new Africa-initiated development strategy sought to address both the economic and political preconditions of sustainable development in Africa. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was initiated by five countries (Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa) and adopted as a continental plan in 2001 at the Lusaka summit of the OAU. It is now an official program of the African Union which, like the European Union, intends to develop into a full-fledged economic and political union.

Within the AU, the NEPAD Planning and Implementing Agency (NPCA) has been established to manage the program. But what is this program all about? As a development strategy, NEPAD is designed as a partnership not only among Africans, but also between Africa and the international community within the context of globalization. Its key priorities, as outlined on NEPAD’s website, are as follows:

1. Sustainable development through peace and security, democracy and good governance, regional cooperation and integration, and capacity building;

2. Policy reforms with increased investments in agriculture and food security; human resources development, including meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the areas of health and education; infrastructure development, including ICT, energy, transportation, water and sanitation; diversification of production and exports; improving intra-African trade and access to external markets; and the environment; and

3. Resource mobilization both domestically and externally, in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA).
Unfortunately, these objectives are more in line with externally imposed development strategies than with the LPA, which remains a valid blueprint for sustainable development in Africa.

As a partnership that is dependent for its success on external resources, NEPAD runs the risks of being too much outward-looking as well as being held hostage by those who control FDI and ODA. Like the unending poverty reduction strategies, it cannot be wholly owned by Africans if the external partners have through the power of their money a veto over what Africans can or cannot do (Sahle 2007).

A key component of NEPAD that provides hope for better management of the development process is the *African Peer Review Mechanism* (APRM). This is a voluntary mechanism by which a country’s performance in the political, economic and social fields is evaluated with a view to recommending corrective action for deficits of democracy and development. As a tool designed to strengthen the political preconditions of economic development, the APRM is a major innovation in African international relations as an intrusive system of pan-African scrutiny in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. The process begins with an internal assessment involving all stakeholders (government, the private sector and civil society, including academia, women and the youth). This is followed by an external evaluation by a team of African experts, which examines the internal assessment, carries out an investigation of its own, and writes a report to be submitted for final evaluation to the heads of state and government whose countries have acceded to the mechanism. On the basis of the experts’ report and the host government’s written response to it, the heads of state and government conclude the review process with final recommendations, which constitute the National Program of Action to be implemented by the country under review.

Critics of the APRM have argued that there should be more emphasis on the accountability of rulers to their own citizens rather than to their peers, who have a vested interest in minimizing the shortcomings of fellow heads of state and government. While this is a valid point, it does not diminish the usefulness of the peer review exercise, since the experts’ report is in the public domain and can be used by democratic forces to challenge public policy and to demand transparency in the implementation of the National Program of Action. Since NEPAD is an AU program, its success will depend on how well the AU itself functions as an agency for pan-African integration.

Finally, with respect to pan-African solidarity in both Africa and around the world, the AU has taken good initiatives in the promotion of peace and security in troubled spots in the continent, and in designating the African diaspora worldwide as the sixth region of the pan-African institution.

On the other hand, visa policies continue to restrict the free movement of Africans, who have more trouble traveling across their own continent than foreigners from rich countries, and citizenship laws make it extremely difficult for an African to become a citizen of another African country. The increasing role of the AU in peacekeeping activities such as those in Darfur and Somalia today is a renewed challenge to its ability to carry out the pan-African right of intervention to protect innocent civilians. Here again, as already pointed out above with respect to the OAU, questions of resources and the political will to mobilize them internally will determine whether the AU is acting autonomously or as a proxy for the United States, the European Union, or France.
On the position and role of the African diaspora as an integral part of the AU institutional framework, the exact manner in which the various overseas African communities are to participate in AU activities remains unclear. However, there is recognition that the growing numbers of Africans and peoples of African descent around the world can play a major role in the African renaissance through both solidarity and investments in Africa (Makgoba 1999). Their contribution to Africa’s renewal and prosperity while continuing to engage in advocacy for African interests abroad should go a long way in strengthening Africa’s independence and position in the world.

Conclusion

Pan-Africanism as an idea of African self-affirmation and a political movement for African emancipation from colonialism and imperialism played a critical role in the decolonization of the African continent, and continues to inspire the dream of African political and economic integration. Contemporary efforts in this regard have been entrusted to the AU and the RECs, with technical support from the AfDB and the ECA. These pan-African institutions have made some progress in galvanizing support for a meaningful pan-African agenda for the 21st century, but they cannot succeed in carrying out the tasks of African integration and development without the political will and the necessary financial contributions of African states. It is therefore imperative that these states should be ruled by men and women with unequivocal identification as pan-Africanists and unbending support for the pan-African ideals and values to which scholar-activists such as W.E.B. Du Bois devoted a whole lifetime of struggle.

(Endnotes)

1. The text of this introduction was first published by The Guardian (UK) online of May 21, 2013 as “Is the African Union Equipped to serve Africa’s People for Another 50 Years?”
2. Its current name is the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH).
3. Du Bois founded The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races, a monthly magazine, in 1910 and served as the first editor of this official publication of the NAACP until 1934.
4. Likewise, quoting the Ghanaian historian Adu Boahen, Lewis (2000:568) writes as follows: “Boahen believed that Nkrumah’s real spiritual mentor was not W.E.B. Du Bois but Marcus Garvey, that the Ghanaian president ‘reached out for Du Bois out of reverence and because he was the lone survivor – but Garvey was the source.’ One need only register the significance of the red, black, and green colors of the national flag, centered by a black star, to realize the powerful influence of Garvey, suggested Boahen.” On Nkrumah’s initiation into pan-Africanism in the U.S. and the UK, see Sherwood (1996).
5. Lewis correctly adds that it is erroneous to identify Ghana as the first sub-Saharan nation to become independent, since that honor belongs to Sudan, which obtained its independence in January 1956.

6. From a Yoruba leader and premier of the Western Region of Nigeria, Awolowo became the leader of the social democratic opposition in the country. Wachuku served as Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives and then as foreign minister.

7. The number 20 is reached by adding French-administered Togo and Cameroon to the former French West Africa (Côte d’Ivoire, Dahomey/Benin, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Soudan/Mali, Upper Volta/Burkina Faso) and French Equatorial Africa (Chad, Gabon, Middle Congo/Congo-Brazzaville, Oubangi-Chari/Central African Republic), respectively, plus the three countries of Belgian Africa (DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi), and the three of British East Africa (Kenya, Tanganyika/Tanzania and Uganda).


9. In a personal communication in September 1987 in London, former Tanzanian minister of economic development Abdul Mohamed Babu told me that the 1964 resolution on the inviolability of boundaries inherited from colonialism adopted at the second OAU summit in Cairo was introduced by Tanzania at the request of Haile Selassie. It is not difficult to understand that the true intention of the wily old man was to obtain the OAU seal of approval on Ethiopia’s participation in the colonial partition of Africa, during which the Abyssinian empire incorporated the Ogaden, among other territories. With Somali nationalists then calling for a single state over Greater Somalia, Ethiopia saw great merit in upholding colonial boundaries, while at the same time ignoring the irony of its occupation of Eritrea, a former Italian colony.

References


