
Astronaissance: communicating astronomy & space to the African imagination

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Abstract

As recently as 2009, a five hundred page textbook on international relations did not even mention the African Union in its index. The same applied to the Wikipedia entry on international organizations until a colleague of this author corrected that omission in 2011. The mainstream international relations literature has the perspective that our continent is marginal, the AU invisible, and Africa is a problem, that is spoken to, or spoken for.

African agency in global governance is a perspective whose time has come. Drawing on constructivist and transformational theories, this paper explores how the African Union family or organizations, including its regional communities such as COMESA, EAC, ECOWAS, and SADC, seek to engage with and negotiate Africa's positioning in global governance. These Pan-African initiatives go far beyond anything that ASEAN, the Arab League, or the OAS have succeeded in.

This paper draws upon research by the author and Kiki Edozie for their forthcoming book *The African Union's Africa*. (Michigan State University Press, 2014)

Introduction

The mainstream international relations literature has the perspective that our continent is marginal, the AU invisible, and Africa is a problem, or spoken to, or spoken for. Western media and popular commentators too often tend to construct Africa as a homogenous entity only in a negative or pejorative context, and conceive positive contexts as examples of heterogeneity or exceptionalism.

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The OAU-AU is the first permanent institutionalization of pan-Africanism, a movement founded in the diaspora, but from the start with continental participation. This social movement resolved to assert African agency as a counter-hegemonic force in global governance, and prevent it remaining the object of imperialist and colonialist agendas.

A major ideological task of the AU family of organizations is to construct a continental identity that can assert African interests in global financial, trade, and security institutions. A tougher long-term task is for the AU to engage with the dominant powers in such institutions in attempts to transform them. The half-century unwritten arrangement that only northern, western candidates may head the World Bank and IMF is one such unacceptable fact of global life, which the AU seeks to end.

The scholarly literature on Africa is overwhelmingly either case studies in area studies, or taught as examples of political and social pathologies in comparative politics, such as neo-patrimonialism, clientelism, and kleptocracy. It is symbolic that one of the most recent major volumes on the African Union was published by not an institute of international relations, but a centre for conflict resolution. (Akokpari et al, 2008) In the few cases that African features in international relations literature, this is not as studies of African agency, but as the object of extra-African military and other interventions.

A more subtle point is that if a curriculum is constructed around conflicts or peacekeeping, this prism could project a negative self-image of the continent in the minds of its students. A syllabus that embraces African agency and achievements, alongside the current headline problems, can help energize constructive intellectual engagement, graduate and undergraduate, with a range of potential solutions.

A similar consideration should be borne in mind in compiling reading lists for the classroom. The scholars of Africa and its diaspora should feature prominently in teaching bibliographies, to inspire and build confidence in the current student generation in their own research potential and future careers. For example, *The African Union and its Institutions* by Akokpari et al (2008) has eighteen authors who are all black in the broad sense of the term; the same applies to the fourteen authors in Adejumbi and Olukoshi's *The African Union and New Strategies for Development in Africa* (2008); the same for almost all fifteen authors in *Peacebuilding, Power, and Politics in Africa* (2013) edited by Curtis and Dzinesa.

The Architecture of Continental Integration

The literature on Pan-Africanism and continental integration chooses to conceptualize this in the narrowest possible sense of solely inter-governmental organizations (IGOs). Even with these, most literature studies either the AU or a regional organization, ignoring a host of treaties that specifically reiterate that the regional communities (RCs) are cornerstones of the AU and its security architecture. Such IGOs are buttressed by a myriad of quasi-governmental organizations (QUANGOs), continental entities, and civil society associations which all enjoy affiliate or associate status within the AU family.

Figure 1 is a first attempt at an analytic conception of over fifty such entities. One interesting pattern that may be discerned is that while the bulk of current AU activities concern *ad hoc* peace-keeping and peace-making, the great majority of its permanent institutionalization aims at economic integration and development, prioritizing the *longue-durée* perspective of a Jean Monnet or Thabo Mbeki. Politicians focus on actions which will show results before the next elections. Bureaucrats similarly prefer projects whose results could help to get promotion within three or four years. It takes a special kind of visionary political leader to commit major time and political capital to a programme which cannot show significant results until after their term of office expires, and will only reap its major gains after their physical lifetime. Europe had such leaders in Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman; Africa had them with Thabo Mbeki, Olusegun Obasanjo, Diallo Telli, and Adebayo Adedeji. The author of the book significantly titled *International Organizations As Law-Makers* notes of, amongst others, the AEC Treaty and the Constitutive Act of the African Union:

“The treaty provisions establishing these African institutions anticipate international organizations charged with discharging the kinds of plenary executive, legislative, and even judicial powers ***once associated exclusively with national governments.***” (ALVAREZ: 2005: 116)

In short, the AU shows a long-term commitment to an ever-closer continental union that is not intended by the Organization of American States, the Arab League, or the Association of South-East Asian Nations, and would not even be contemplated by NAFTA nor MERCUSOR.

Pan-African Initiatives in Negotiating Global Governance

The OAU started to set up an embryonic diplomatic corps with missions to represent it at the UNO (NY & Geneva), World Bank and IMF (Washington DC), EU (Brussels) and Arab League (Cairo). Part of the functions of the AU diplomatic mission in NY was to seek to coordinate as much as possible a voting bloc by the AU states in the UN General Assembly. The AU and its Peace and Security Council (PSC) has also held regular consultations with the UN Security Council to influence UN peace-keeping and other interventions in Africa. The AU purpose is to assert African agency as a partner in global governance, and oppose the 1960s situation where Africa was merely the passive recipient of UN-commanded operations.

The increased stature of the AU saw a significant reciprocal development start in 2006, when the USA became the first of over fifty-five states to accredit ambassadors to the AU, indicating that the AU has acquired international stature far above the former OAU. All the other powers such as China and India followed suit, as did regional organizations such as the EU, Arab League, and *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)*. Addis Ababa now has more diplomatic missions than any other city in the world except New York. We should also note in

passing that China, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have accredited diplomats to COMESA, and China has also accredited a diplomat to ECOWAS. These are in the nature of trade-related consular representation.

Next, the AU set up the auxiliary diplomatic activity of regular conferences. These started in the format of one country who is a major donor, investor, and trader in Africa meeting with the entire continent in conference.

Table 1

Continent to Country

Africa-China Cooperation Forum (FOCAC) 2000

CADFund opens office in JNB & ADD

Africa-France

Africa-India 2008

Africa-Japan (TICAD) 1993

Africa-Korea 2009

Africa-Turkey

Africa-USA (AGOA)

This is precedent-setting: it is the first time that China has accepted it will negotiate some things with Africa as a whole, rather than bilaterally between itself & a country with one-hundredth its population. It is also unusual for Japan, India, Korea to negotiate directly with AU or continent as a whole.

Table 2

Continent to Continent

Africa - Europe (AU-EU)

Africa - South America Summit (ASACOF) has set up a permanent secretariat.

Africa - Asia Sub-regional Organizations Conference (AASROC)

AU 6th Region - conferences with diaspora in Americas, Europe, & west Asia

Both ECOWAS and the AU have established substantial peacekeeping architecture, with the AU adapting from the ECOWAS precedent. ECOWAS intervened in four civil wars:

Liberia 1990-1998, 2003

Sierra Leone 1997-2000

Guinea-Bissau 1998-1999

Côte d'Ivoire 2003-2004

At peak, the scale of military intervention necessitated 13 700 ECOMOG troops, with 12 000 from Nigeria. This was war fighting at divisional strength, and tougher than traditional peace-keeping.

Operationally, both ECOWAS and the AU have escalated from conventional peacekeeping to “peacemaking” or “peace enforcement” which are diplomatic

euphemisms for full-scale war fighting up to brigades and divisions on battlefields ranging from Somalia to the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Adebajo’s apt words, the complexity in both Darfur, Sudan, and the DRC includes fighting in civil wars “with multiple factions that are often mutating”. (Adebajo: 2011: 242) Nothing like this has been even attempted by the Arab League, OAS, and ASEAN, and would not even be contemplated by NAFTA, SAARC, or MERCOSUR.

This is an interesting African case study where, for once, reality has raced ahead of rhetoric. The African Standby Force was supposed to be officially launched in 2010, with the formalities then postponed to 2015. But between the AU and ECOWAS, African peacekeeping armies have had boots on the ground *continuously* for two decades. The ground truth is that the African Standby Force (national army units designated to be on standby for episodes of deployment) has evolved towards Nkrumah’s envisioned Pan-African *Standing* Force, even before its formal inauguration.

**Table 3:
Ecowas & Au Peace-Keeping Architecture**

ECOWAS post-1993	AU post-2004
Mediation & Security Council	Peace & Security Council
Ecowarn	Continental Early Warning System
Council of Elders	Panel of the Wise
ECOMOG, later ESF	ASF
Defence Council, & Defence Commission	Military Staff Committee
decisions by two-thirds majority	decisions by two-thirds majority

The most relevant AU activities are its engagements with the UNSC and individual NATO powers to negotiate its preferred policy choices as opposed to those imposed by western powers upon the Côte d’Ivoire, Libya, Mali and other states. One significant contrast is between the UN interventions in the early 1960s in the Congo, which were powerless to prevent the assassination of Patrick Lumumba, with the 2000s interventions of both the UNO and AU in the same country, where significant African agency and choices are visible on the peacemakers mandate, and their relationship with the government of that country.

In the case of the Côte d’Ivoire, former South African president Thabo Mbeki challenged why the NATO powers ignored election irregularities in the north, but only considered those in the south. He highlighted that the timing of the election would aggravate polarization of the citizens.

A Case study in Pan-African agency is the decade-long struggle for jurisdiction over the trial of Hissène Habré. Senegal repeatedly refused to extradite him to Belgium.

The Senegalese Government finally agreed in 2012 to set up an international tribunal whose judges would be appointed by the African Union. It might be lack of funds that deterred the AU from what they would no doubt prefer, to extend the jurisdiction of the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights in Arusha.

The Au in Comparative Perspective

AU achievements outperform all regional communities (RCs) except the EU.

First, the peacekeeping by the AU-ECOWAS-SADC is on a scale vastly beyond, or never even attempted, by ASEAN, EU, LAS, NAFTA, OAS, or SAARC.

Second, the AU has the largest number of governments that any RC ever attempted to coordinate, or harmonize policies: 54.

Third, there are over 54 ambassadors accredited to AU; while conversely the AU has 5 diplomatic missions abroad.

Fourth, the AU family has over 60 continental or regional structures, entities, and affiliates engaged in political, judicial, and economic harmonization. These include four customs unions, three monetary unions, three regional power grids, and two FTAs.

Fifth, four regional courts and three continental judicial and quasi-judicial entities assert jurisdiction that involves partial cession or sharing of sovereignty: the long-term consequences of this merit repeating:

“The treaty provisions establishing these African institutions anticipate international organizations charged with discharging the kinds of plenary executive, legislative, and even judicial powers once associated exclusively with national governments.” (Alvarez: 2006)

This is not yet confederation, still less Nkrumah's federation, but it is the start of evolution towards a polycentric sovereignty, where power is divided between a national capital and the seats of continental diplomatic and judicial authorities.

As well as these five achievements, the AU has not yet built up the capability to broaden from peacekeeping to also choreograph economic negotiations with the EU and the WTO. It needs to develop capacity with hundreds of funded posts for each of econometricians, economists, international trade lawyers, and statisticians. There is the same lack of capacity at REC level – COMESA, EAC, ECOWAS, SADC. During the latest round of Africa-EU negotiations for “Economic Partnership Agreements” the EU insisted on dismembering the RECs Africa chose, and situating African countries in different configurations for benefit of EU: eg “SADC Minus”. The EU

also demands separate EU agreements with Egypt, Libya, and South Africa. When AU states refuse to negotiate, they are threatened with higher customs duties on imports from Africa. The consequences include that even when RECs upgrade to customs unions, they are forced to maintain the expenses of perpetuating internal customs posts. If Africa negotiated as a unified bloc of one billion consumers and mineral resources, the EU could not afford to demand such dismemberment. AU member states also suffer endless EU attempts to sneak in protectionism in drag: for example a “carbon miles” tax; and “phytosanitary” regulations, such as a ban on South African oranges if five of them have a harmless black spot fungi on orange skins. The EU demand that South Africa kill all Karoo ostriches if even one fell sick with bird flu, led to half the ostrich farmers leaving the business during 2013.

A second challenge is that each REC needs more linkages to AU structures. The AU has opened a liaison office with ECOWAS, and the AUC chair convenes a committee of REC chief executives biannually. Clearly, these are only the two opening steps of what is necessary.

A third challenge is that the AU suffers from the same realities of power and politics as the UNO, ICJ, and ICC. It cannot enforce sanctions or judgments against a major power, but only weaker countries, so the AU, ECOWAS, SADC, shrink from criticizing election fraud in Nigeria or Zimbabwe, but take action only against the Madagascar & Niger governments. The AU has never imposed sanctions against Ethiopia for refusing to withdraw from Badme after the 2003 Border Commission ruling to award it to Eritrea. ECOWAS was politically frightened to enforce one ECCJ ruling, and the SADC suspended its Tribunal in 2010 and narrowed its jurisdiction to forbid further court rulings on human rights – but the AU has the mandate to impose sanctions against tyrants.

A fourth challenge is that more political will is essential to compel governments to pay annual dues in full on time, and to get tougher with defaulting governments until they are deterred from defaulting. The AU will also need, like the EU and ECOWAS, to levy a continental tax to pay budgets in full. This is one prerequisite to scale up the AUC and REC secretariats with professionals for negotiation capacity.

A fifth failing of the AU and regional communities is that they need to promptly ratify all protocols and treaties eg. The Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights, of 2008, has still not received sufficient ratifications to come into effect five years later. The same applies after fifteen years to implement agreements such as the 1999 Yamoussoukro Decision for “Open Skies” (which already needs the next step of an EU-style “continental seamless air space”). Another example is the ASF launch scheduled for 2010, and now postponed to 2015.

A sixth step, overdue since 2009, is to empower the Pan-African Parliament through direct elections, plus a co-governance role in the AU budget, and acquiring an

oversight role over the AU Commission. In Europe, the EU is criticised for elitism; percentage polls in European Parliamentary elections are so low as to undermine its legitimacy. Literally only one in a million Africans directly involved with Pan-Africanism (AU, RECs); only tiny elite of intellectuals, less than one in ten thousand, is passionate about Pan-Africanism. Another task that still awaits the AU is to popularize it to broad strata of citizens through direct voting for the PAP as part of national general elections. This can also be boosted through a continental format for sports and other mass contests and activities, TV weather forecasts, visas and passports.

Conclusions

This paper briefly demonstrates that it is possible to construct a curriculum, compile reading lists for teaching, and foreground topics which all contribute to highlighting African agency in global governance. Such a counter-hegemonic lens is useful as a corrective to the dominant media perspective, and may help build student confidence in themselves and their continent. The AU sometimes wins over, at other times loses, to NATO powers' preferences.

This does not mean self-censorship of any of the AU problems listed above. For, in overall judgement, it is clear that the accomplishments of the AU, ECOWAS, and the other operational regional economic communities far surpass their contemporaries on other continents, with the sole exception of the EU. This has been a significant achievement on a shoestring, accomplished with far less resources than are available to others.

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