Review: Visions of African Unity: New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects

By:

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The edited volume **Visions of African Unity. New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects** (palgrave macmillan, 2021) by Frank Gerits and Matteo Grilli (eds), is an ambitious and welcome publication on varying but complimentary aspects of Pan-Africanism in the 20th and 21st centuries. The book´s forte lies not only in its historical approach to the topic at hand but also in the bringing together of current research angles on matters of African unity, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and the later African Union (AU). Also, the diverse set of contributing authors in terms of geography (Africa, Europe, USA), professional backgrounds, and gender makes this publication a welcome read.

This work´s main aim is thus to bring together different scholars and examples of projects linked to Pan-Africanism or of attempts to achieve African unity since before but in particular after decolonisation. The time scope therefore covers almost the entire 20th century, continues on to the early 21st century, and ends with an outlook on what the African continent could do to achieve African unity in the near and far future.

Overall, this volume is 435 pages long and consists of the introductory chapter, followed by a topical separation into IV parts that make up a total of 16 chapters:

- Part I: *Imagining and Debating African Unity* (pp. 21-129, four chapters)
- Part II: *The Impact of African Liberation and Cold War on African Unity* (pp. 131-259, five chapters)
- Part III: *From the OAU to the AU: Historical Trajectories* (pp. 261-397, five chapters)
- Part IV: *Postscript* (pp. 399-423, one chapter)

Within the book´s four parts, apart from the already mentioned interdisciplinary approaches, other issues discussed are past and present ambiguities within African unity movements, institutional cooperation (or the lack thereof), international relations, networking, and non-state aspects. Particularly welcome is also the inclusion of pre- and post-colonial as well as colonial and anti-colonial cultural dimensions which other comparable publications tend to lack by only focussing on political, social, and economic angles.

In *Part I*, both state and non-state actors are analysed as enablers or creators of obstacles to African unity processes. The presented case studies and regions range from Ghana, the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF), to East Africa. *Part II*, on the other hand, presents the matter of African unification in times of the Cold War and especially – but not only – the connected proxy wars by highlighting the Biafra Wars, anticolonial militant actions in Morocco, or liberation struggles caught in the realities of the bipolar world order. The focus of *Part III* is the transformation of the OAU to African Union (AU). Key topics addressed are security and securitisation as well as human rights and peacebuilding issues following in particular the atrocities of the 1990s and early 2000s. Last but not least, *Part IV* steers away a bit from the prior sections by

informing us on the current state of the OAU/AU archives.

Part I

Chapter 2 by *Kate Skinner* presents the case of Ghana and its relations to Togo in the early 1960s with a focus on 1963 following the assassination of Togolese President Sylvanus Olympio. Skinner asks questions on diplomatic recognition between states and competing visions of African unity. The third chapter was written in a joint effort by *Chris Vaughan, Julie MacArthur, Emma Hunter, and Gerard McCann*. It informs us about the debates regarding regionalism in East Africa during 1960-1977. Their analytical input involves a breaking up of previous more narrow assessments of East-African regionalist thinking by going beyond the state and its statist politics of federation and instead incorporating pan-African views of Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Ugandan citizens. *Robert Anthony Waters, Jr.*, uses Chapter 4 to offer insights on Kwame Nkrumah´s labour policies and how he allied with Gold Coast Labour leaders envisioning a global Communist-led movement combined with a Pan-African trade union idea, attempts to gain British support but also alienating some of his own supporters. Part I then ends with *Lamine Doumbia´s* and *Ousmane Diouf´s* chapter on Mali and Senegal and how those two countries created their views on African unity from a West-African and also grassroots projects point of views. This essay argues for the importance of French West-African dynamics being an influential part of the bigger aim of African unification.

Part II

The sixth chapter, written by *Chris Saunders*, looks at the historical and often contrasting developments of views on continental unity in Southern Africa. He does so by analysing three periods of visions: 1960-1975, 1975-1990, and from 1990 onwards. Sanders also offers analyses on reasons for successes or failures. *Myra Ann Houser* introduces the reader in her essay to Botswana and how its struggles for African unity were often subject to external forces and how both the country´s legal apparatus and own identity were subject to the liberation struggles of its bordering neighbours. *Alexandra M. Dias* offers insights in chapter 8 on how insurgencies in former Portuguese colonies, especially in the case of Mozambique, prioritised an anti-racial approach to unification and decolonisation as well as the obstacles that lay in the finding of

a common international society against colonialism and white-minority rule in Africa. Chapter 9 by *Oluchukwu Ignatus Onianwa* lets one delve into a Cold War scenario that is concerned with the Nigerian Civil War, the role of the OAU during it, and how Anglo-American diplomacy influenced the latter in order to counter French and Soviet Union interventions in Nigeria at the time. The tenth chapter by *Paraska Tolan-Szkilnik* makes a compelling case to pay more attention to Morocco´s early role in African liberation struggles rather than giving credit to Algeria alone. The essay highlights how already in the 1950´s Morocco provided funds and weapons to African independence movements and how non-state anti-colonists could form outside of a postcolonial country´s purview.

Part III

This section starts with a contribution by *Kathryn Nash*. She elaborates upon debates from the 1950s onwards that influenced the creation of the OAU, especially with regards to its Charter (and Article II), its commissions, norms, and debates related to state sovereignty and peace(keeping) measures in decolonised Africa. Chapter 12, by *John J. Hogan*, informs us about the transformation from the OAU to AU and the discussions – some more fruitful than others – of a new security architecture including increased attention paid to peace-building and -keeping missions following the many human rights violations in Africa during the 1990´s in particular. In the 13th chapter by *Rui Garrido* the reader is introduced to the Banjul Charter, the Ouagadougou Protocol including its long-term effects, the varying trial-and-error phases of the African Court on Human and Peoples Rights and accessibility for civilians. It ends with an outlook on how the court is to best implement its expanded jurisdiction in the future when confronted with acts of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. In chapter 14, *Alice Musabende* applies as case study the Burundi Crisis of 2015 to research the topic of collective identity in the AU and how such a phenomenon might influence contemporary challenges in African politics. Finally, Part III concludes with a convincing essay by *Toyin Falola* who invites the reader to take a deeper look at necessary future-oriented developmental directions for African unification to happen. His views are of an overarching nature that include proposed economic policies, regionalisation, loosing Western ties in the parliamentary and education sectors, encouraging sports and entertainment programmes, unified continental military, and a

forging of African culture with modern technology and science programmes. In short: Afrofuturism.

Part IV

Here, *Chedza Molefe* leads us to a better understanding of the OAU´s/AU´s archives by explaining its difficulties (eg. lack of regular staff and premises) and lack of recognition. Furthermore, this chapter offers a very useful chronological summary of the organisations´ most important dates, events, and declarations.

One weak point in this publication are the numerous repetitions of OAU/AU history and specific items like general pan-African history, Nkrumah´s ideals, non-interference, state sovereignty, and how to address human rights violations in the individual chapters. The number of repeating introductions to the mentioned topics could possibly have been avoided by communicating beforehand (for instance in the introduction or foreword) a general summary of just those core issues.

Overall, however, this book, contains original contributions to the field of African unity and Pan-Africanism studies by covering several eras and disciplines. Rather than relying on the more typical approaches as offered by economics and political sciences, this book enhances the approaches by joining those studies with more historical and enriching research fields like International Relations (esp. Regionalism), postcolonial, archival, Cold War, legal, and Africanist studies. The editors and authors have proven to have an excellent grasp of both historical and contemporary issues alike and I can fully recommend this book´s various essays to any interested reader.

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