

On the Pillars of Pan-Africanism: An emerging AU foreign policy

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Abstract

The field of foreign policy analysis has seen growing attention given to the role of non-state actors in shaping foreign policy decision-making, including the case of the European Union (EU). Given that the EU is the only regional organisation with a shared foreign policy approach there is a wealth of analysis interrogating the region's agency on the world stage. To the south, the intergovernmental/regional institution of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and its successor, the African Union (AU) has demonstrated its own agency in international relations, but with little critical analysis concerning the framework guiding its international approach. Given the political nature of the organisation there is debate on whether it is possible to develop a coordinated AU foreign policy. While there may not, as yet, be an explicit foreign policy, this paper points to the role of Pan-Africanism in providing continuity from the OAU to the AU as the underlying framework shaping the pursuit of an 'independent and significant Africa'. Nevertheless, while Pan-Africanism ideals provide a shared understanding in developing a nascent foreign policy, they also present a challenge to coherence and cooperation between member states in the AU's approach to international relations.

Key words: Foreign Policy, Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the African Union (AU), Pan-Africanism, African Renaissance, Common African Position

Introduction

As the discourse on foreign policy continues to evolve new voices, issues, and concerns are gaining traction in the literature.² Foreign policy has typically been defined as 'the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations' (Hill 2003:3). The emphasis on

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² For a good discussion on the evolution of the concept of foreign policy see Halvard Leira, The Emergence of Foreign Policy, *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 63, Issue 1, March 2019, Pages 187–198, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy049>

the role of the state in international relations has, however, given ground to a growing interest in the role of non-state actors (sub-national supra-national). This pluralist approach, which emerged in the 1970s, challenged the central role of governments in foreign policy formulation and implementation. The result has been what Alden and Aran (2017:1) call a ‘dizzying array’ of actors engaged in foreign policy. The burgeoning number of perspectives and approaches considering the role of these actors in foreign policy analysis has seen research contributions on areas as diverse as the impact of individual leaders, to bureaucratic politics, and the idea of a multistakeholder foreign policy (Masters 2012). This expansion and diversity of the actors engaged in international relations also reflects the increasing number of constituencies whose interests intersect the domestic and international environments.

While Hill’s definition is useful in highlighting the role of actors in shaping international relations, Morin and Paquin (2018:3 italics in the original) point to an understanding of foreign policy as the ‘*rules governing the actions of an independent political authority deployed in the international environment*’. This definition gives emphasis to the idea of foreign policy as the norms and principles that guide an actor’s approach to international relations (Tocci, 2008; Barber 2005). The importance of understanding the normative framework that gives shape to an actor’s approach is evident in the literature that, for example, points to the role of principles such as democracy and human rights in foreign policy. Whether this is the focus on principles such as the UK’s ethical foreign policy (Frost 1999), South Africa’s principled foreign policy (Barber 2005), or the development of a normative framework in guiding the European Union’s (EU) international relations from the Common Foreign and Security Policy to the more recent EU Global Strategy (2016).

The analysis of the EU’s foreign policy, its implementation, and practice is useful in building an understanding of how a ‘pooled foreign policy’, shared between sovereign states, is developed. It also highlights a gap in attention given to the role of other Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) in international relations. Certainly, when it comes to the African Union (AU), Welz (2013:426) points out that while ‘academic knowledge about the AU has increased rapidly, little has been written about the organization’s external relations and its role outside of Africa’. As an emerging area of analysis (Murithi, 2010; Murithi 2014; Tieku, 2021) there is considerable distance to

cover, not least around the debate on what the organisation's approach to international relations is, and whether this could be called a foreign policy.

Unlike the EU, the AU is not a supra-national organisation as its members have not sought to pool sovereignty in deepening cooperation across matters of politics, economics, and security. The objectives of the AU focus on unity and solidarity, and while there is reference to economic integration, there is little reference to deeper political integration. This is a point reiterated by Khadiagala (2013) who distinguishes between the AU's emphasis on regional cooperation and coordination around a common objective, rather than regional integration. Nevertheless, cooperation between member states and a growing role for the AU in international relations, has seen the African continental organisation acting as a 'voice' for Africa (Tieku, 2021). It is this increasing level of cooperation that has seen authors such as Edozie and Gottschalk (2014:33), point towards the AU as an 'emerging suprastate organization'.

The position of the AU as an international actor is reflected in the growing discourse considering the organisation's role and impact in international relations. This includes studies that investigate the AU's engagement with states such as China, through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), as well as relations with other regional organisations such as, for example, the AU-EU Strategic Partnership, and relations between the organs of the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council. There is an argument within the literature that the AU, and its predecessor the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), is recognised as an actor on the international stage. As Landsberg points out, the AU is 'Africa's premier international or interstate organization and is by extension a foreign policy actor in its own right' (Landsberg 2018:49). Tieku (2021:258) too argues for the AU's international agency in pointing to the 'relative independence it enjoys' in managing external engagement on behalf of its members. However, whether there is a defined, coherent, and coordinated approach that guides the organisation's international actions is still a matter of debate. In other words, while there is an argument for the AU's expanding agency, there is less discussion on what the guiding principle(s) are that inform the AU's expanding international agency. Indeed, the question is whether the AU has a foreign policy approach towards its external environment.

This paper argues that there is what may be considered a nascent foreign policy, one that has emerged over the course of the Organisation's long history.

Guiding this approach to the external milieu is the vision and principles of Pan-Africanism. The principles of Pan-Africanism served as the foundation in the development of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the forerunner of the AU. Shared Pan-African norms were used by the continent's political elite to give expression to the OAU, and today the AU's international relations. Drawing on the Pan-African literature and policy from the OAU and AU (including conventions, partnership agreements, common African positions, and Agenda 2063), this research explores the role of Pan-Africanism in shaping the continental organisation's nascent foreign policy. The analysis argues that the principles of Pan-Africanism provide the framework for cooperation and unity of position but goes on to address the challenges posed to the development of a continental foreign policy, which has left the AU at times with what is seen as a somewhat schizophrenic approach to international relations.

This chapter begins by looking at the principles of Pan-Africanism in shaping an African international orientation before unpacking how its core principles underpinned the OAU, and the AU's ability to assume a role as a 'dynamic force in the international arena' (AU, 2013: 1). This is assessed through an analysis of these principles in practice before finally turning to address the challenges facing the idea of an emerging foreign policy. The AU, after all, remains governed by its member states; yet, as this paper argues these challenges are not unique to the AU. States and the EU frequently face the challenges of reconciling foreign policy principles with practice. What is significant is that Pan-African principles continue to be drawn on in underpinning the priorities and interests of Africa's international relations.

Pan-Africanism in the orientation of Africa's international relations

The international agency of the AU builds on that of its predecessor, the OAU. The OAU itself is born of the vision and principles of Pan-Africanism. Reflected in the Charter this includes an emphasis on ensuring 'freedom, equality, justice, and dignity', African agency, supporting cooperation and unity across the states of Africa, 'sovereignty and territorial integrity', protecting peace and security, and 'welfare and well-being' through common institutions (OAU, 1963:1). These principles are based in Pan-Africanism which emerged as a means of addressing and responding to the de-humanising effects of slavery and colonialism. As Kasanda (2016:180) argues, the pursuit of 'African unity, African emancipation, and African sovereignty constituted the war-cry for this

generation of African thinkers and activists'. The inclusion of these principles within the OAU's organization effectively saw, what Adeyeye (2018:217) calls, the institutionalisation of Pan-Africanism. It also lent its international focus to the Organisation.

Pan-Africanism is, by its very nature, outward looking in its orientation. Its early thinkers brought their internationalist perspective from within the African Diaspora of the US, the Caribbean, and Europe. This included thinkers such as Henry Sylvester Williams, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and George Padmore among others (Geiss, 1967). Here initial efforts took place in addressing the challenges of racism and colonialism facing people of African descent and Africans on the continent (Murithi, 2008; Sherwood 2012; Mathews, 2018; Taye 2021; Moloji and Landsberg 2021). Following a series of Pan-African conferences in Europe and the US (1900, 1919, 1921, 1923), it was former Ghanaian President, Kwame Nkrumah (1960-1966), who brought Pan-Africanism back to the Africa continent, calling for self-governance and an end to slavery, colonialism, and racism (Abegunrin, 2016:2; Thompson 1969:3).

In addition to its international origins, with much of the malaise affecting the continent emanating from abroad, the international focus of Pan-Africanism was inevitable as it sought to address colonialism, imperialism, and racism. This necessitated engaging the international milieu to secure peace and security, socio-economic development, autonomy and self-determination, sovereignty, and territorial integrity for the continent (Moloji and Landsberg 2021). This included engaging the former colonial powers in the liberation of African countries as well as lobbying international organisations such as the United Nation (UN). Here African agency succeeded in securing discussions on race, territory and slavery on the international agenda as well as the creation of networks between Africa and the diaspora, and the drive to end colonialism (Edozie and Gottschalk 2014).

The OAU, however, fell short in securing deeper integration and the prosperity hoped for by the Pan-Africanist visionaries of Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere. This had a detrimental impact on the Organisation's ability to exert greater international agency (Taye 2021: 38-39). Taye (2021) presents the critique that it was the OAU that served to undermine the activist approach of Pan-Africanism. This is premised on the central role played by individual

leaders in driving Pan-African ideals, which he argues, were undermined by the bureaucrats of the newly formed OAU whose focus became one of ‘procedures rather than the results of the Pan-African movement’ (Taye 2021:41). The point made here is that it was the role of an activist leadership that ensured the prominence and visibility of Pan-Africanism. Indeed, the history of Pan-African thought demonstrates the significance of leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere in providing the momentum and driving the institutionalisation of the idea within the OAU. The link between leadership and Pan-Africanism is a point further highlighted by Murithi (2010:194) who argues that Pan-Africanism is the expression of the ‘spirit of solidarity and cooperation among African leaders’. The personalisation of Pan-Africanism meant that there was a loss of momentum when these individuals were no longer positioned to enable the activism around the vision. While the high-profile momentum of Pan-Africanism may have been more subdued when its key proponents were lost (changes in government), the principles of Pan-Africanism nevertheless continued to underpin the focus of the OAU’s international relations. This was evident in the continue focus on decolonisation, continental development and prosperity, and the importance of maintaining independence and sovereignty of these newly emerging African states.

The institutionalisation of Pan-African within the OAU meant that the loss of visionary leadership such as Kwame Nkrumah, did not see the loss of these principles in shaping Africa’s international relations. Ensuring sovereignty, unity and solidarity, ending colonialism, and addressing a worsening economic environment within Africa remained central to the OAU during the Cold War and the external threat to the continent (LeMelle, 1988). With Africa the site of many of the proxy wars fought during the Cold War, it was the OAU that led the way in defining a position of neutrality in defence of Africa’s agency and independent position in international relations. Nevertheless, the great power rivalry between the US and Soviet Union did undermine the ability of Africa to build a coordinated international position between its member states as many of the newly emerging countries were wooed by the super-powers. With the end of the Cold War and a renewed determination to ensure African agency, the 1990s saw calls for an African revival captured in the idea of an African Renaissance. Africa’s post-Cold War leadership³ formed what Khadiagala (2010:382) calls

³ Thabo Mbeki (South Africa), Olesegun Obasanjo (Nigeria), Meles Zenawi (Ethiopia), John Kuofor (Ghana), Benjamin Mkapa (Tanzania), Joachim Chissano (Mozambique), Abdulaziz Bouteflika (Algeria), Abdulaye Wade (Senegal)

the ‘African Renaissance coalition’, committing Africa to political, economic, social, and cultural renewal (Muchie et al 2013).

Recognising the stagnation of an activist Pan-Africanism across Africa and the continent’s increasingly peripheral geo-political position, Africa’s renaissance leaders set out to transform OAU. Despite political differences on what the best form of cooperation and unity between member states should be,⁴ an agreement was reached on the creation of the AU which officially replace the OAU in 2002 (Adeyeye 2018). Key among the points of transformation was the move from ‘non-intervention’ to ‘non-indifference’; but the *raison d’etre* of the ‘new’ continental body continued to reflect the Pan-African ideals including the decolonisation of the African continent, unity, development, peace and security.

The rhetoric calling for an African renaissance was aimed at addressing some of the challenges inherent within the traditional understanding of Pan-Africanism. At its core the primary focus on ensuring redress when it comes to racism and colonialism remained, but added to this was an emphasis on including the international norms concerning democracy, human rights, and socio-economic development, reflecting the changing international context. These principles are evident in the AU Constitutive Act (AUC 2000) and Agenda 2063 (AUC, 2013) which presents a more assertive AU with a focus on securing an independent, unified, and development orientated approach in its international relations. The Charter begins by reaffirming the traditional focus of Pan-Africanism through:

- Defending the ‘sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its member states’,
- Promoting and defending ‘African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its people’ (AU 2000:5-6).

However, the influence of the African Renaissance in expanding the focus of Pan-Africanism sees the inclusion of elements such as:

- Encouraging ‘international cooperation, taking due account of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’
- Establishing ‘the necessary conditions which enable the continent to play its rightful role in the global economy and in international negotiations’

⁴ See for instance the different positions between the Brazzaville, Casablanca and Monrovia groups on the best form of union.

- Working ‘with relevant international partners in the eradication of preventable diseases and the promotion of good health on the continent’ (AU 2000:5-6).

That the transition from the OAU to the AU was able to progress in a relatively short period of time has been linked to the continuation of the underlying principles of Pan-Africanism. As Tieku (2004:252) argues, it was the ‘normative framework that made the creation of the AU possible [which] can be traced back to Pan-African ideals’. Certainly within the opening pages of the AU’s Constitutive Act (2000:5) there is a reiteration of the role of the OAU and Pan-Africanism in building unity in support of liberation, shaping a common identity, and providing a ‘unique framework for our collective action in Africa and in our relations with the rest of the world’.

As was the case for the OAU, the AU expresses a clear outward orientation aimed at addressing the marginal role of the continent in global politics. On the 50th anniversary celebration of the OAU/AU (2013), Africa’s leaders mapped out the continent’s 50 year plan under the heading: *Agenda 2063, The Africa We Want*. The aspirations of the AU include an Africa that is a ‘Strong, United, Resilient and Influential Global Player and Partner’ (AU, 2013). As the continent’s developmental master plan, Agenda 2063 is predicated on Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance. This is evident in the goals and priorities that point to the focus on the political integration of the continent ‘based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of the African Renaissance’ (AU, 2013). What is also apparent is the development of Pan-African thinking, from a focus on addressing racism and the subjectivity of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora, to Pan-Africanism as a necessary pre-condition for socio-economic development, cooperation on political affairs, and achieving peace and security (Murithi 2014: 1-2).

Building the pillars of a nascent AU foreign policy

The history and development of the OAU/AU is then inherently linked to Pan-African, with its principles shaping the international priorities and aspiration of the organisation. Nkrumah was among the first to maintain that without unity, Africa could not achieve its main objective of liberating itself from colonial rule nor be able to develop or compete with the global superpowers (Nkrumah

1963:xvii). As such the principle of unity and solidarity provided a framework that informed the OAU's engagement with the external environment. This was seen as crucial in ensuring that Africa's voice was taken seriously on the global stage. Nkrumah argued that,

If we in Africa set up a unified economic planning organization and a unified military and defence strategy, it will be necessary for us to adopt a unified foreign policy and diplomacy ... The desirability of a common foreign policy which will enable us to speak with one voice in the councils of the world, is so obvious, vital and imperative that comment is hardly necessary (cited in Edozie and Gottschalk 2014:30).

The vision of unified approach for Africa in international relations included the creation of a single representative to the United Nations (UN) and the development of a single foreign policy to exert Africa's weight in global affairs (Nkrumah, 1963:177). While this vision was not achieved fully in practice, it points to the importance the OAU attributed to the principle of building a common or shared identity. It also saw the OAU acting to present a united African voice on the international stage in the struggle against colonialism, and subsequently neo-colonialism, in pursuit of independence from powers external to the continent. This included securing political independence for its member states from colonial powers as well as asserting the continent's non-alignment as the ideological divisions of the Cold War deepened (OAU 1963:4). Successes in promoting a unified position included the pursuit of international action against apartheid South Africa, where Africa's resolve against racism secured UN General Assembly Resolution 2202A(XXI) that declared apartheid a crime against humanity (Nkiwane 2001; Legum 1975). It also saw Africa's engagement with individual states and IGOs against the minority ruled government in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) (Edozie and Gottschalk 2014: 38). The OAU's international relations were further bolstered in securing observer status at the UN and the development of an external partnership in the form of the Africa-League of Arab States (LAS) (1977) (AU, ND).

The shared principles of unity, solidarity and independence have continued to shape Africa's international relations, with the OAU seen as crucial in providing a political centre to the continent (Adeoye 2020:3). As the former colonies gained their political independence, the focus of Pan-Africanism turned to challenge the economic impact of colonialism and the continued under-

development of the continent. Despite gaining political independence, Africa states continued to bear the burden of the colonially structured neo-liberal economic policies. Yet through a focus on a Pan-Africanism, that does not only talk to the priorities of political independence and solidarity, an emphasis was placed on economic goals, notably development and economic emancipation (Moloi and Landsbery 2021, Amin, 2014). This is reflected in the international priorities of the OAU which, emphasised addressing Africa's colonial economy, one of inequality from decades of extracting natural and human resources from the continent (Munyai 2020). Nkrumah (1963) argued that Africa's political independence was meaningless without economic emancipation. In adopting the importance of economic cooperation in Africa's international relations the Economic and Social Commission (OAU Charter) was established, which was the first attempt at achieving economic emancipation at the regional level. Following from this, the Department for Economic and Social Affairs was tasked with coordinating Africa's position when it came to negotiating treaties such as the Lomé agreement (1975) with Europe (Edozie and Gottschalk 2014: 38). The importance of presenting an African voice in the talks with the European Economic Community (EEC) also saw the negotiations conducted through the OAU, rather than the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). This culminated in a common African position at the Abidjan conference in May 1973 and finally the Lomé Convention in February 1975 (Legum 1975).

Yet despite agreement across the continent on the significance of Pan-Africanism in the pursuit of an 'African voice' internationally, there was not always agreement on how the principles should be addressed when it came to relations within Africa (intra-African relations), particularly as the new sovereign states sought to secure their independence (Legum 1975). The pursuit and defense of sovereignty served to undermine efforts aimed at creating a coordinated and coherent African position, as member states jealously guarded their own independence. The ability of the OAU to define a shared foreign policy was further hampered by a lack of resources, as well as the failure of member states to comply with decisions taken by the Organisation (Okolo and Langley 1974). The transition from the OAU to the AU aimed to address the challenges presented by sovereignty and its contribution to conflict, insecurity and division within the Organisation. The African Renaissance Coalition was itself a response to the continued commitment by those within the continent to address the preoccupation with the first-generation principles of Pan-Africanism, which was increasingly seen as being out of step with changing global values and norms. While there has been some progress, as the section

below demonstrates, this is yet to be fully realised in thinking within the AU. This is evident, for example, in the division between member states on future of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (discussed later in this chapter).

Pan-Africanism as the framework for the international relations of the AU

Echoing Nkrumah, former South African President Thabo Mbeki (1999-2008), called for unity in promoting African agency in international relations (Moloi and Landsberg 2021, Mbeki 2002). In his opening remarks as the host of the inaugural AU summit in Durban, South Africa, (former) President Mbeki urged that:

By forming the Union, the peoples of our continent have made the unequivocal statement that Africa must unite! We as Africans have a common and a shared destiny! Together, we must redefine this destiny for a better life for all the people of this continent. The first task is to achieve unity, solidarity, cohesion, cooperation among peoples of Africa and African states.... We must deepen the culture of collective action in Africa and in our relations with the rest of the world (Mbeki 2002).

In other words, the Pan-African principles of unity and solidarity continue to shape the approach in the AU's international relations. The introduction of the African Renaissance rhetoric was aimed at highlighted a transition in thinking to a second-generation Pan-Africanism. This is a Pan-Africanism that pursued non-indifference and the importance of human rights and good governance. These principles, however, found themselves in direct contradiction to the more traditional understanding of Pan-Africanism with its emphasis on non-interference and sovereignty. The result has led to something of a schizophrenic approach by the AU to international relations. This has seen instances where there is significant commitment to presenting a single African voice on international issues juxtaposed to a continued emphasis on member state's sovereignty.

When it comes to building unity regarding the AU's international relations, the Organisation has made progress at a functional level in carving out an organising role. From the early 2000s, the Strategic Plan of the AU Commission included among its priorities the need to promote 'the establishment of a Union external relations policy and an effective representation framework of missions' (AU 2004: 11). This called for the strengthening of 'strategic ties and alliances with other regions and with international partners', reinforcing 'Africa's

capacity to speak with a single voice in major international negotiations' and contributing to global governance (AU 2004: 11). In addition to the establishment of permanent offices at the UN, EU, the League of Arab States (Tieku 2021), the AU has been participant in shaping the type of relations with its new partners including relations established with the EU (JAES) and China (FOCAC) in 2000, the South America Cooperation Forum and partnership with Korea in 2006, India and Turkey in 2008, Japan (TICAD – full member) in 2010, and a high-level dialogue with the US in 2013 (AU, ND). The AU has assumed a more active role in addressing these international relations through the creation of the Partnership Management and Coordination Division (PMCD), responsible for the vision, strategy, and coordination of the AU's international engagement. It is also responsible for the development and integration priorities set out in Agenda 2063 (AU, ND), as well as considering new partnership requests, for example the more recent requests from Vietnam and Australia. In this context, the importance of the Pan-African principle of providing an 'African voice' in defending the continent's interests has seen developments in functional unity, coordination and cooperation. This has served to build on what Tieku (2021) points to as providing the organisational agency of the AU.

A more active AU in international relations has seen acknowledgement of the need to convene an African Diplomatic conference to develop a common diplomatic policy (AU 2004: 12). Indeed, greater functional capacity is needed in meeting the goals of Agenda 2063 and positioning the continent as a 'major partner in global affairs' (AU 2013). Enhanced diplomatic presence in pursuit of Pan-African priorities are evident (although scope for further development) in negotiations between the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council. This focuses on addressing the call for 'African solutions for African problems', emphasising the role for the AU on questions of peace and security both in managing relations within, and external to the continent (Mathews, 2018; Forti and Singh 2019). This should be taken against what the AU has already achieved in bringing its member states together in what Landsberg (2018:49) calls a 'norms revolution', negotiating agreements on a number of normative instruments the point to efforts in demonstrating a commitment to Pan-African principles. The development of the African Peer Review Mechanism, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the creation of the Pan-African Parliament, and the Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, all underscore efforts by the AU and its member states to present an African position on development, governance, peace and

security to the external milieu. For instance, NEPAD has been used as a means to engage developed countries on Africa's priorities. In 2005 the African leadership collective⁵ was invited to attend the G8-Africa session at Gleneagles, Scotland. Through the agreed NEPAD platform, Thabo Mbeki was able to set out Africa's priorities which included investment in ICT, infrastructure development, and agriculture (around subsidies in particular). Other points put on the agenda by Africa included accessible and reliable resources for project implementation as well as addressing the needs of debt relief for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (DIRCO, 2005). The AU's Pan-African focus on economic emancipation is shaping a more assertive engagement with the continent's international environment, particularly in its development of partnerships.

Tieku (2021) argues that the AU's further agency has seen demand for the Commission's representatives to participate in international forums in representing an African voice. The focus on unity and solidarity in underpinning functionality has then seen the development of a more active and assertive Africa on the international stage. At the same time this requires greater agreement on what these representatives are pursuing in terms of Africa's priorities. Greater coordination and cooperation in presenting a unified position in promoting the principles of Pan-Africanism have seen progress in supporting the development of common African positions (CAPs). Here the AU has played a central role in encouraging closer cooperation between member states in securing an agreed African position on global challenges. This includes, for example, the Common African Position on the Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (2020), which aligned to the AU agenda 2063 flagship project in peacebuilding – Silencing the Guns in Africa. Other common African positions (CAP) include the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2014) in support of the realisation of the Agenda 2063; the African Union Common Position on an Arms Trade Treaty (2012), the common African position for the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (2016), and the common African position on Climate Change (2009) within the UNFCCC.

⁵ In 2005 this was led by President Olusegun Obasanjo and included the leaders of South Africa (Thabo Mbeki), who was an invited participant at the G8 outreach meeting in Gleneagles, Senegal, Ghana, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Egypt and Algeria.

Through cooperation and coordination on the CAPs, the AU has been able to exert pressure in ensuring a voice for the continent. For example, in the case of climate change, the African group has affected agency in pursuit of the continent's priorities through coordinated efforts in defining an agreed position on climate change, and even staging a walk-out that has brought attention to the priorities of the continent. The common position on climate change reflects the importance Pan-Africanism gives to ensuring African agency in the development and prosperity for the continent through its focus on addressing adaptation and additional, accessible and scaled up finance (Masters 2012a). On the question of sustainable development, collective action in defining an African position allowed the AU to inform global governance in the negotiations concerning the post-2015 Development Agenda, with a particular input on SDG16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) (Donnelly and Sidiropoulos 2020).

The priority of unity, solidarity, development in providing an enhanced voice for Africa was again evident in the AU's international position in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The AU drew together member states in coordinating a position in the G20 and in the creation of the AU COVID-19 Response Fund (Donnelly and Sidiropoulos 2020). This was underpinned by the importance of ensuring Africa's agency in securing access to global vaccines and personnel protective equipment (PPE) necessary in addressing the pandemic. As Donnelly and Sidiropoulos (2020) note, 'Solidarity has been the watchword of African governments in their international messaging in relation to COVID-19: African leaders have been prominent among those calling for global leadership, collective political will and coordination through multilateral agencies'. Indeed, it was Africa that presented a united front in managing efforts to address the virus while responses to the pandemic saw EU member states become increasingly parochial in their approach.

Given increase expectations for Africa's participation in international relations the AU has given recognition to the need to manage partnerships through initiatives such as the African Union Partnership Coordination and Interactive Platform (AU-PCIP). The platform is aimed at ensuring any imbalance in the AU's partnerships are addressed. This follows from a position where 'the cooperation between Africa and its partners has 'mainly been a donor-recipient driven relationship that is skewed in favor of the donors' (PSC 2019). This includes working towards financial independence in addressing continued

reliance on donor support for the AU. Given the neo-liberal structure in which post-colonial Africa finds itself, the focus on supporting independence and economic emancipation has continued to be central to the development of the AU's agency in international negotiations. This has born fruit for the AU, for example, when it comes to the JAES. Hurt (2020:147) argues that,

It also signals an acknowledgement by the EU of the heightened status of the AU as an institution. In fact, due to a request by the AU, the 2017 summit held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, under the auspices of the JAES, was renamed an AU-EU meeting rather than 'Africa-EU' as previous summits had been.

The traction the AU is gaining in international forums is further evident in the shift in the EU's focus to the AU Commission rather than the African, Caribbean and Pacific Secretariat (Langan 2020:229).

The Pan-African principle on furthering the continent's development and prosperity is further evident in the AU's Partnership Strategy and Policy Framework, to 're-orient Africa's partnerships in line with the Continent's ambitious agenda for economic, political, social transformation' (AU 2020). The development of the strategy is aimed at 'strengthen[ing] Africa's voice and global representation with the aim to effectively leverage technical and financial resources for its own development' – the development comes on the bases of recognition of the need to develop a 'holistic AU Partnership Strategy and Framework' (AU 2020). Negotiations on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which were approved in Addis Ababa January 2012 and launch in January 2021, is a further expression of the AU's agency in mitigating its peripheral position in the global economic structure. As a flagship project of Agenda 2063, the AfCFTA is focused 'on accelerating intra-African trade and boosting Africa's trading position in the global market by strengthening Africa's common voice and policy space in global trade negotiations' (<https://afcfta.au.int/en/about>).

Challenges to Pan-Africanism and a nascent foreign policy

Keeping 55 member states aligned when it comes to expressing a coordinated and coherent voice for Africa is a challenge. In 2013 Welz (2013:426) argued that the AU had 'not consistently emerged as a collective actor', pointing out that 'disunity leads to an absence of collective action, which in turn contributes to the AU's inability to influence governance beyond its borders'. Khadiagala

(2013:375) too points to the challenge of cooperation in exacting a unified international approach, noting that despite ‘the broad consensus on the benefits of integration, there has been a mixed record of national commitment to regional institutions’. Yet this is not a problem unique to the AU. EU member states are frequently at odds over the organisation’s international positions on issues such as migration or on intervention, as was the case in conflicts in Syria and Libya.

For the AU, there is still disagreement on who/how Africa should be represented on the international stage. In addressing concerns on sovereignty and representation the Banjul formula (2006) was created to alleviate the need for all 55 heads of state of government to attend partnership summits (often at the call of the partner). The idea was that the AU would select 15 African leaders, including representatives from the 5 regions, who would attend the summit (although all leaders had the option to attend if they wished). Nevertheless, in practice, the formula has largely been abandoned (PSC Report 2019).

Such is the importance given to presenting a unified policy position, that challenges to coordination and cohesion were addressed in the 2017 Kagame Review on AU reform. It was agreed that there needed to be a common voice, and that the AU should be represented by members of the Bureau of the Assembly, the Chairpersons of the regional economic communities (RECs), the Chairperson of the Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee of AUDA-NEPAD, and by the Chairperson of the AU Commission (Apiko 2020). This was in line with meeting the priorities of ‘political affairs, peace and security, economic integration, and *Africa’s global representation and voice*’ (Kagame 2017: 7 italics added).

It is not just at the functional level where there is disagreement, critiques of the shortfalls in coordination and cooperation on the AU’s international relations have also pointed to the gap between principles and practice. For instance, Landsberg (2018:54-55) argues that despite the emergence of common African positions (CAPs), cohesion has not always played out in practice. This builds on Tim Murithi’s (2010:203) argument that ‘the AU has made practical efforts to function as an international actor’, but that there is a shortfall when it comes to integrity, where the continent’s leaders commit to lofty principles, norms and

values in the rhetoric, but this is not evident in practice. The argument is that the AU is not being taken seriously by its members. In other words, with regional integration not yet a concrete reality, this undermines what can be achieved in the organisation's international relations (Murithi 2010:203). This division is certainly evident between AU member states on the arrest of Al-Bashir and the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) where the AU went from proactively championing, to undermining and calling for the withdrawal of African states from the ICC (Mills 2012).

The lack of unity between member states was also evident on the question of Libya, where the AU was undertaking its own initiatives to find a political solution, yet African representatives on the UN Security Council (Gabon, Nigeria, South Africa) failed to address this in their own positions in the voting for UN Security Council Resolution 1973 (Dewaal 2012). Even within decision on socio-economic negotiations there has been resistance to agreeing a common African position on a post-Cotonou agreement, which was undermined by countries in East and West Africa (Senegal and Burkina Faso, Uganda and Kenya)(Hurt 2020:147). It is these responses that reflect a continued emphasis on national interests and sovereignty that have contributed to the perception that the AU appears not to have a foreign policy, rather 'policies *on*, and in response *to*, issues' Landsberg (2018:60 italics in the original). Yet despite these shortfalls, the AU continues to present an African voice with its roots still firmly positioned in the principle of Pan-Africanism that provides the framework of an emerging foreign policy approach.

Conclusion – is there an AU foreign policy

While there is certainly disagreement between member states, there is also considerable agreement between them on the need to reform the institutions of global governance (UN, IMF, World Bank), to addressing donor-recipient hierarchy in development assistance, to scale-up additional and sustained finance for climate change adaptation, and ensuring Africa has a prominent voice at the international negotiation table. If foreign policy is understood as the orientation or approach of an actor towards its external environment, then there is evidence to suggest that the AU has a nascent foreign policy. It is then not a question of if, but when a formal AU foreign policy will come to fruition. There are already calls for Africa to adopt a 'smarter collective bargaining' approach, whether that be in shaping multilateral negotiations or in the ability to

set agendas in international engagements (Donnelly and Sidiropoulos 2020). This was a point addressed in the Kagame Review (2017:3), which while critical in pointing to the obstacles in Africa's international engagement, noted the importance of developing 'the institutional capacity needed to seize the available advantages' (Kagame 2017). The challenge will be in reconciling the importance states continue to attach to first generation Pan-African principles of sovereignty and political independence with the shift in towards those principles highlighted by the African Renaissance: addressing human rights, democracy, and furthering continental integration.

Since its inception the OAU, and subsequently the AU, have faced pressure from the international community to engage in international relations, whether this be on questions of security, migration, the 2007/8 financial crisis, the environment, and health (COVID-19). These factors are drawing African countries together, requiring cooperation in addressing transnational problems that have disproportionately negative implications for the continent. This is reflected in the negotiation and development of the CAPs and the move to establish a Partnership Strategy and Policy Framework (AU 2020). While there is the argument that the AU's intergovernmental structure has seen the 'organisation negotiating its international role on a case-by-case or thematic basis' (Apiko et al 2021), this point overlooks that there is agreement between states on a growing number of international issue areas. The AU's very existence is the result of the 'clash and accommodation' of the OAU member state's priorities and interests, and yet the continental organisation continues to exist over fifty years since its inception (Tieku 2004). As Legum (1975, 211) argues, the OAU provided 'the arena within which common African policies were forged, or disputed, and where the tensions of inter-African relations can be released'.

That there is 'clash and accommodation' on other areas of discussion does not mean that there is not scope for the development of an African position. While there is debate by AU member states on the orientation of the continent on issues on the international agenda, there is also broad agreement on the need to address racial inequality and the marginalisation, which in turn calls for unity and cooperation in shaping an independent African voice. What is evident, as this chapter argues, is that there has been continuity in the principles that underpin the continent's approach to international relations. This is encapsulated in Pan-Africanism, which provides the platform on which a

foreign policy is emerging. Cooperation, leading to coordination and the need to respond increasingly as a collective to the international environment, is paving the way for the incremental development of a nascent AU foreign policy.

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