AFRICA IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH:

ADVANCING AGENCY, AMPLIFYING VOICES



EDITED BY
BOB WEKESA

ESI

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FOREWORD

Africa in the Global South: Depth as a Prerequisite for Action

Jeggan Grey Johnson
Advocacy Advisor, Open Society Foundations

African agency represents an intentional thrust to shape global political, economic and social outcomes in a noisy democratic space that promotes pluralism and international cooperation. It articulates a philosophy that is not new, but one that has long been a fundamental pillar of Pan-Africanism. Policymakers casually use the term in speeches and policy documents to indicate that African agendas are being set at home and abroad. Scholars draw on African agency to justify teaching, research and knowledge generation founded on Afrocentric epistemology. Public intellectuals, among them civil society activists, think tankers and journalists, invoke African agency as justification for advocacy on a diverse range of African problems.

African agency also offers validity to a wide range of causes for a continent grappling with the challenges we face today. Its usefulness can be seen, at the very basic level, in its wide usage. African agency mobilises Africanists from all walks of life around a set of concepts and practices that centre African thought systems. It is useful because it not only diagnoses African challenges but, more importantly, proffers pathways to redressing them. African agency can be seen at play in several initiatives at continental, sub-regional and national levels, especially in the 'age of externally imposed policies', in which Africa's growing geopolitical power and its choice to define its own priorities and mobilise resources are anchored in the African Union (AU) Partnerships Policy.

However, problems arise when policymakers echo African agency in their speeches and policy documents merely as lip service rather than as a genuine intention to live by the ethos of the concept through deliberate,

redemptive action. African agency becomes hollow if scholars use it only to pontificate rather than as emancipatory scholarship that links theory to practice. Public intellectuals who invoke African agency but fail to show tangible outcomes, for instance, in terms of change in governance structures, are engaged more in decibels than in results-oriented action.

Moreover, African agency is such a lumbering term that its concept and application have run threadbare in more ways than one. This is where this edited volume comes in. Emerging from discussions between colleagues at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2022 during the US–Africa Leaders Summit, this book is part of a dedicated project aimed at advancing African agency and amplifying African voices. Doing so requires rescuing the term from its incipient misapplication. Nuance, however, can be achieved only if and when the term, its conception and, significantly, its application are grounded in specific contexts. One such increasingly important context is the geopolitical category of 'Africa in the Global South'.

In this book, readers will be reminded that Africa is part of the Global South, yes, but also a unique entity within a category that encompasses rising global powers such as China, India, Brazil and the Gulf States. African agency is often, and correctly, understood vis-à-vis the Global North. This, however, tends to gloss over African agency in a much broader global context. African agency in the Global South must therefore take cognisance of Africa's shared characteristics with all Global South countries, while at the same time recognising that few, if any, African nations have the economic wherewithal to match the global powers within this formation. It is only when this fact is candidly acknowledged that African agency can be exercised within the Global South.

As readers will see in this book, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in 2018 and operationalised in January 2021, is an example of African agency. Yet intra-African trade, which the AfCFTA was intended to boost, remains low, at 16.7 per cent in early 2026, against the anticipated 58 per cent.[1] Advancing African agency requires a closer look not only at internal factors – such as non-tariff barriers – that militate against Africa trading with itself, but also at the strategies employed by some of the Global South powers. The argument that the neo-imperial

structure of global trade is partly to blame is an important one to consider. It is noteworthy that most of the global powers in the Global South play by the same neoliberal trade rules that Global North countries have leveraged to their advantage. The current era of resource imperialism amply demonstrates this reality.

One of the strengths of Africa is its geographical, economic, political and cultural diversity. However, the potential for this diversity to be leveraged for Africa's progress has remained latent. In fact, in some instances, this diversity has served as an Achilles' heel, creating discordant voices rather than the unified voice of a well-conducted orchestra. This analogy features across the book, offering pathways that can help amplify Africa's voice in the Global South and indeed globally. To this end, African agency can be rolled out in the form of cultural diplomacy, thus helping shape the continent's socio-political relations within the Global South. In the process, African agency would also ensure that African women are full participants in the renewal process, rather than add-ons to global reform agendas.

African agency should also go beyond Africa's membership of formations such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77 (G77), which bring together global powers as well as developing nations, many of them categorised as low-income. If a new multipolar world is being defined and negotiated, then member states belonging to the African Union should be strategic in leveraging Global South organisations as a collective to advance this agenda. Global powers in the Global South should demonstrate by deed that they understand Africa's need for a more equitable global governance architecture. Africa should also join forces with other developing countries, particularly from Latin America and Asia, to demand that global powers in the Global South demonstrate that they are desirous of an equitable global governance system. Fittingly, this is a major strand of thought in this book, linking the theorisation of Africa in the NAM and G77 to tangible, practical steps to advance African interests in the Global South.

Discussions around a shifting global order have rightly factored in geopolitical fragmentation, or what Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has called a global rupture. This is a time of deep uncertainty

in global governance, fraught with risk. Rather than the Global South offering a coherent set of solutions to the stalemate in multilateralism, each of the powers within the South is pushing for self-serving multilateral reform agendas. As argued throughout this book, African agency would therefore be predicated on Africa generating its own ideas to navigate the unpredictable circumstances now unfolding. This would include analysing the interests of Global South powers and negotiating with them from an African standpoint.

Received wisdom holds that certain global public goods can only be provided by Global North powers. Scratch the surface a little, and the evidence suggests that in some sectors, Global South powers are ahead of their Global North counterparts. Aspects of the digital economy are an example. China and India are global leaders in a wide array of digital innovations. They have leveraged their digital assets to structure asymmetrical relations with Africa, for better and for worse. African agency is when African actors leverage their relations with Global South powers to advance in the digital technology sectors. Rather than lamenting digital capitalism and digital colonialism, African states can study the strategies that countries such as India and China used to climb the digital value chain to secure their own digital sovereignty. This discussion is gaining traction in debates about Africa using its critical minerals to become a manufacturer of digital products.

In some respects, Africans have much to learn from Global South powers even as they tap indigenous knowledge. In the health sector, for instance, some of the Global South powers have done exceedingly well. This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when countries such as India, China and Brazil managed to innovate and ramp up the production of personal protective equipment and vaccines, using local knowledge and resources. African agency is when Africans borrow ideas from elsewhere, domesticate them and even improve upon them. Africa has great potential in the health and medicine sector, given its natural endowments in fauna and flora that form the ingredients of medicines and therapies. African agency is when African scientists look carefully at how some of the Global South powers have utilised indigenous resources to climb the ladder of medical manufacturing.

This book is one of several initiatives focused on African agency amid mind-bending changes in the way humanity is governed. This book provides perspectives on Africa in the Global South, perspectives that will be useful as much for intellectuals in universities and think tanks as for policymakers, lawmakers and international organisations. The wider series of activities, including public engagement, research, publication and advocacy, extends beyond the Global South. We want to ensure that African interests are secured in the renewed push for United Nations reform. Strengthening Africa's influence in the reform of the United Nations Security Council and global financial architecture, for instance, will be difficult but not insurmountable. It can be achieved by building and coordinating coalitions of stakeholders for a multipronged campaign. In many respects, these efforts should be directed towards enhancing the capacity of African institutions at all levels. This calls for a reimagined Pan-Africanism. It also calls for understanding and embracing the mantra voiced by Kwame Nkrumah more than 65 years ago: 'We face neither East nor West; we face forward'. This forward-looking Afro-possibilism, articulated in the past, remains highly relevant to our current situation and aspirations. [2]

I hope you will read this book not only as a means of apprising yourself of new thinking about African agency, but also as a means of taking agency into your own hands and contributing to the notion of agency in action.

Endnotes

1 TRALAC. 2026. TRALAC Daily News. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.tralac.org/news/article/17118-tralac-daily-news-22-may-2026.html* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

2 Nkrumah, K. 1960. ADM positive action conference for peace and security in Africa. [Online]. Available at: *https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/72/Positive_action_conference_for_peace_and_security_in_Africa.pdf* (Accessed 9 July 2026).

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Africa, the Global South, Agency and Voices

Bob Wekesa
African Centre for the chapter of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Introduction and context

Ideas and practices around the Global South have gained traction in geopolitical dynamics, inspiring novel studies, research and teaching. It has been leveraged to explain major developments in world affairs between the Global South itself and in relation to its opposite, the Global North. As with all new developments at the intersection of praxis, nailing the particularities, implications and trajectories of the Global South is contested, not least because the term is open to wide sets of interpretations. This is true for the entire globe, the southern hemisphere, and, for the present volume, Africa.

The antecedents of this edited volume can be traced to numerous discussions over the past eight years by the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS) at the University of the Witwatersrand and several of its partners, including Makerere University in Uganda. At the outset, for a curious reader, the basic question is: why would an academic-cum-research centre ideally focused explicitly on the relations between Africa and the US shift gears to expend energy on Africa in the Global South? After all, the US is categorised as belonging to the Global North, and by no means is it in the Global South! This would thus suggest that a Centre for the Study of the US should, in a manner of speaking, 'keep to its lane ' and focus on Africa's engagements with the Global North and, indeed, the great global power that the US is. While research on Africa's engagements with the Global North is well established, far less attention

has been paid to Africa's position within the Global South. This imbalance provides the rationale for the present volume.

The fundamental explanation for this detour is that the more a perceptive intellectual analySes Africa-US relations, the more they are drawn into debates about the competition between the US and countries considered Global South powers: Brazil, China, Cuba, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates. In literature and public spheres, claims of varying credulity have been made about the declining power of the Global North/West and the rise of the Global South. China and India are emblematic examples of the 'Global South rise' theory. Africa comes into the picture because it is presumed to unequivocally belong to the Global South.

Look up literature on the rivalry between global powers in Africa and you will not miss the growing body of writings trying to make sense of the great power competition in Africa. However, try to find coherent explanations on why Africa is a Global South region, and you will struggle. To address the gaps in scholarship on Africa's involvement in the Global South, this volume takes a slightly different approach. It focuses on only one set of the global powers, currently assembled under the ill-defined but catchall phrase 'the Global South'. That is, arguments in the book move away from the Global North–Global South debate, unless such debates are linked to a Global South issue. This focus has a backstory from the viewpoint of work at the ACSUS, and doubtlessly many other intellectual enterprises in and beyond the African continent.

For instance, while the focus of the Centre at its inception in 2018 was an endeavour to develop African-generated knowledge on the United States, it became inevitable to consider the question of the competition between the US and China and the implications thereof for Africa. The founders of the Centre would receive inquiries from Chinese, Indian, Russian and other colleagues from Global South academia and policy circles on why the University of the Witwatersrand saw it fit to establish an American Studies centre rather than, say, a Chinese or Indian or Russian studies centre. Intellectuals from the United States and the Global North/West would become enthusiastic whenever the Centre hosted an event dealing with global affairs, the understanding being that it would help

shed light on what Global South powers were doing in or with Africa.

There are examples galore in these respects across disciplines and sectors. Suffice it to use, as an illustration, the digital competition between the US and China that reached a vituperative trade war level in the 2018 –2020 interregnum (see Ayodele 2022). Part of the demand by the President Donald Trump I administration was that leaders and nations around the world desist from using Chinese digital technologies in line with the then US policy of debarring the use of Chinese technologies in the US itself. Our focus dramatically shifted on the fulcrum of the ensuing US digital edicts as African presidents, such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, and Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa flatly declined to banish Chinese tech firms led by Huawei Technologies from their territories (see Reuters 2019). Our intellectual effort included several in-person and virtual convenings, and the publication of a series of thought leadership articles and academic journal papers over the period. From the tapestry of the analyses, three major views emerged from the writings by the contributors (Africa in Fact 2022): One was that China was a good partner for Africa in terms of establishing digital infrastructure (through state-backed financing of companies such as Huawei Technologies and ZTE), while the US couldn't be dismissed offhand due to the preponderance of its software platforms (such as Google, WhatsApp, FaceBook, Linkedin, etc.). The second was that Africa should not be drawn into the tech competition between the great powers but instead strategise to tap the relative advantages from the US and China to its own interests, many of them spelled out in African national, regional and continental plans. The third was that, while drawing on the positive aspects of US and Chinese technologies, African countries should be wary of the negatives on either side.

The geotech competition is but an example, with an ideologically laden competition also intensifying in merchandise trade, culture, education, critical minerals, artificial intelligence … and more (see Wekesa 2021a; Adarkwah et al. 2025). The import of this seemingly circuitous justification is that Global South countries exemplified by China were (and are) making inroads further into Africa's economic, political and cultural spheres, to the chagrin of Global North powers led by the US.

Yet, it was also clear that the Global South was (and is) itself a general term, emerging and co-opting Africa into an intensifying and escalating geopolitical battle (see Trans 2024).

It was thus important that a more dedicated effort be trained on Africa in the Global South even as the Global North–Global South divide widened and sucked in African countries. In other words, while it is important to analyse the impact of the rivalry between the Global North and the Global South, it is germane for African standpoints to focus on each of these political geographies separately, if nuance in the service of African interests is to be achieved. If it seems like this chapter and, indeed, this book volume are jarringly focused on the Global South in a manner that lets the Global North off the hook, the thematic focus dictates as such.

The Global South Kampala summits

While grappling with an African starting point to the geopolitical competition in Africa, an opportunity arose spectacularly in early 2024. This was in the form of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77+China (G77) convening of back-to-back summits in Kampala, Uganda, between 15 and 23 January 2024 (see Wekesa and Khadiagala 2024). It was an opening that provided room to focus on the Global South from an African perspective. It was the first time that these Global South institutions convened simultaneously in an African country. Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni was hosting an event during which Global North/West countries, as well as Russia, would be conspicuous by their absence, by dint of not being NAM/G77 members. Was this happenstance or calculated? China and India, two major powers in the other significant Global South formation, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), would be in attendance. Heads of State and Government from the 120-member NAM and the 134-member G77 or their representatives would be in Kampala to witness the Global South plant its roots in Africa.

ACSUS partnered with the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Makerere University to organise a one-day forum on 19

January 2024 at Makerere University. We were certain that the summit presented an opportunity for Africans to delve into and reflect on the epistemic, scholarly, conceptual and methodological significance of Africa in the Global South. Africa was being re-imagined as the epicentre of the Global South through the NAM and the G77 summitry. This was not dissimilar to the summit diplomacy now labelled 'Africa-plus-one summits' that have gained prominence as global powers summon large numbers of African leaders to chart ostensibly collective vistas of bright futures (Soulé 2020; Soulé 2021; Wekesa 2024).

Leaders from around the world were congregating in Kampala for formal, state-to-state discussions and negotiations. We were determined to insert our voices in a non-state-actor fashion at Makerere University, bringing together Kampala-based academics, intellectuals, civil society members and youth. Broadly, it is this thinking that informed the title of the forum: 'Africa in the Global South: Advancing African agency, amplifying African voices', convened on 19 January 2024 (Annet et al. 2024). At the end of the vibrant forum, it was agreed that the stimulating discussions deserved fleshing out in a book project. It would allow for an interdisciplinary reflection on Africa in the Global South through four interrelated questions:

> "What are the 'African positions and interests in the Global South'? What are the 'inequalities and asymmetries in the Global South' from an African perspective? What are the 'comparisons of relations between the Global South and the Global North in an increasingly multipolar world'? More broadly, what does 'the rise of agenda-setting global summits and conferences into which Africa has been co-opted' mean for Africa?"

We sought an inter- and multi-disciplinary enunciation of Africa in the Global South, convinced that the dynamics were too expansive to be pigeonholed into a single discipline. It is for this reason that this chapter does not valorise any single discipline.

These questions ultimately became the issues that contributors to this book grapple with. Drawing on some of the perspectives and discussion

points from the forum report (see Annet et al. 2024) as a launchpad, this introductory chapter considers some of the issues that could guide scholarship on Africa in the Global South. We have largely left the title of this book as it was during the Makerere forum. The title can be treated as keywords for a new strand in Africa's interdisciplinary international study: 'Africa', 'the Global South', 'Africa in the Global South', 'African agency', 'advancing African agency', 'African voices', 'amplifying African voices'. It would indeed appear that this was one of the first major conferences to explicitly focus on Africa in the Global South. Analogously, this is among the first books to offer sustained scholarship on this topic.

While the NAM and the G77 summits were the focal point of our debates, discussions and pontification in early 2024, the trajectory of the present book goes beyond the two Global South organisations. The Global South is a far broader category than just the NAM and the G77, even though they occupy a commanding presence in the Global South. Thus, contributions in this book comprehend the importance of the two organisations while incorporating the multiplicity of ideas and practices that go beyond them.

An African justification

One may question the focus on 'Africa', given the oft-cited diversity on the continent. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere in the Africa–China context (Wekesa 2021b), there is no contradiction in referring to Africa at the continental level (for instance, from the viewpoint of a single landmass represented in global institutions by the African Union), subregional level (from the viewpoint that the regional economic communities constitute the five pillars of the Africa region) and country level (where sovereignty lies). In fact, most critiques of African affairs often cite the fact that the continent is unable to act in unison compared to, say, Europe under the European Union (EU) and East Asia under the Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Moreover, some of the Global South countries, such as China and India, are sub-continent-sized and have populations nearly the size of Africa's entire demography. These and other factors make it rational to treat Africa as one entity, even when we are at liberty to

infuse subregional and national nuances where necessary. Analogously, advancing African interests in the Global South should not be limited to either the continental, subregional or national levels. In fact, it should be action that starts and ends at all three levels, and even further down to the grassroots. Through initiatives such as a borderless Africa, the push for a single African passport, and seamless trade through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Africans can start to re-imagine themselves as African citizens without relinquishing their individual-country identities or their allegiances to sub-regional entities.

Africa in the Global South

A probable starting point in attempting to appreciate 'Africa in the Global South' is to consider the language factor from the viewpoint of how the phrase is used. The term has been interpreted as a catchall phrase, a buzzword, a convenient shorthand and so forth, precisely because it simultaneously means many things at once. Multiple definitions encompass the Global South. They include its being a representation of former third world countries, countries contesting the Global North/West, developing countries, emerging countries or economies, middle powers and southern hemisphere nations (Institute for Social Research 2024; Patrick and Huggins 2023; Kleinschmidt 2018). It is into these conceptualisations that the BRICS, as well as the NAM and the G77, are often coopted as synonymous with the Global South. My reading is that the 'Global South' more explicitly denotes the replacement of the derogatory 'Third World' phrase, a period in which the former 'First World' and 'Second World' categories are no longer tenable.

If ambiguities, imprecisions and amorphousness underpin the term 'Global South', then so is the case with 'Africa in the Global South', in what has been referred to as a meta-category (Haug et al. 2021).

As some have observed, if the Global South exists to challenge the social, political and economic dominance of the Global North, then Africa should be at its core (see Tran 2024). This follows from the fact that the Global North's supremacy in financial markets, infrastructure, industrial capacity and global political power is felt most acutely on the African

continent. Yet Africa is not at the centre of the Global South, precisely because it remains the weakest region in global power terms. This tension provides one of the empirically grounded reasons for proposing the 'Africa in the Global South' construct.

If, indeed, African nations have elected to belong to the Global South, amorphous as it is, they need to demonstrate the dividends thereof (see Khanfir 2025). Yet, several Global South countries have powered ahead in fields like digital economy, infrastructure development, agriculture, the blue economy, cultural industries, global trade, manufacturing and others, leaving Africa behind in just about every economic endeavour. It is in these respects that we talk of hierarchies and binaries between Global South countries (Berger 2020), with Africa at the lower end of the pyramid.

The Global South is not uniform. It is fair to observe that countries such as China and India are in the top tier of the Global South hierarchy (Chao 2024). Countries in the regions of the Middle East and Southeast Asia are not too far below the top tier of the Global South across various matrices (see Ha and Won 2024). Most African countries are farther down the Global South ladder, except, in some respects, South Africa. These categories call to mind Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory, according to which countries can be categorised into core, periphery and semi-periphery tiers (Wallerstein 2004). If, in the past, core countries were in the Global North, periphery countries in parts of Africa and Asia, and semi-periphery countries in parts of Asia, Europe and the North Americas, this categorisation has been spun on its head. This is because we can talk of core, periphery and semi-periphery countries in the Global South. If the idea of the marginalisation of the periphery and semi-periphery countries were the heart of the world system theorisation, then we should rethink the same marginalisation within the Global South.

The distinctions and asymmetries that have dogged the Global South make the proposition of a 'Global South powers in the Global South' research agenda feasible. From there, African scholars can devise the construct of 'Global South powers in Africa', a potentially beneficial intellectual enterprise. Received wisdom is that Africa is largely characterised by far less power, perhaps with the qualified exception of

South Africa (see Sidiropoulos 2019). In these circumstances, it is not difficult to agree with analysts who aver that Africa is being pulled in many different directions by the Global South powers, each with its own set of strategies towards the continent (see Tran 2024). At any rate, the power relations between the Global South powers and Africa are skewed in such a manner that 'weak Africa' must almost innately bend to the will of the stronger powers. The onus, perhaps, is thus on African scholars, and Africanists more broadly, to provide evidence-based particularities of enfeebled African agency in the Global South.

Perspectives on Global South powers in Africa can vary and change dramatically, highlighting the fact that relations are not static. In a study of the BRICS in African media, Wekesa (2021c) found instances of optimism, pessimism and pragmatism. Optimism constitutes the positive perceptions towards Global South powers, pessimism is about negativity, and pragmatism speaks to a mix of optimism and pessimism. Such findings are testament to the fact that perceptions about the Global South in Africa are not one-size-fits-all. In this, we see a cautionary tale. Treating the Global South as uniformly good or bad for Africa misses the nuanced picture underlying the complexities of such a large geopolitical category.

From roughly the beginning of the twenty-first century and progressing into the decade of the 2010s, narratives emerged extolling an 'Africa rising' optimism, a nod to Afro-optimism with the Global South powers as Africa's benefactors (Coulibaly 2017). The nominal upward development of several African economies was founded on the infusion of capital into ailing African economies then reeling from painful Global North structural adjustment programmes. This new capital was drawn from confident and emerging Global South powers, particularly the Asian giants of China and India, charting the narrative of Afro-optimism (see Adem 2016). From roughly mid-2010s to the present, high levels of optimism have fizzled out, replaced instead by a multiplicity of negative developments that speak to Afro-pessimism (Fioramonti 2017). A Global South company that demonstrates a swing between optimism and pessimism is the United Arab Emirates logistics company DP World, which has invested heavily in African seaports. It is praised for helping African countries to modernise harbour facilities but concerns have also

been raised about its governance approaches (Pecquet 2024).

As some of the global powers in Africa have risen, narratives of favouritism towards them by African leaders have also come to the fore. There are claims galore to the effect that Africa is being manipulated by Global South powers, evidenced in copious media reporting around the continent. Such charges have been wrapped in the frame of 'emerging powers and neocolonialism in Africa' (Langan 2018). Much of this has been around contracting for public goods and services by state and private companies from the global powers. This then constitutes a deleterious dimension of the Global South powers in Africa.

Another layer of focus is what some have referred to as the 'downstairs relationship'; interactions that involve regular citizens from Global South powers and African citizens in several countries (see Alden and Park 2013). In these respects, we can talk of all the people of the Global South as citizens of this amorphous 'nation'. In many African cities and towns today, we see citizens of some Global South countries plying any number of trades; from real estate and construction to running agricultural businesses; from the selling of merchandise to road and aviation infrastructure development. To some extent, such entrepreneurial Global South citizens are helping African countries advance economically. However, many questions have been raised about the favouritism that has been afforded to the citizens of India, Brazil, China, Gulf States, and others in winning contracts, and the ease with which they start and run businesses. Some of these accusations have tended towards corruption made against some African leaders. The legality, transparency and openness of Indian, Chinese and United Arab Emirates businesses in Africa have ended in street protests in the recent past (see Kiriungi and Chibelushi 2024; Martorano et al. 2021; Human Rights Watch 2023). The fact that tensions between the citizens of African countries and companies from Global South countries have often spilled into confrontation evinces a point of divergence in Global South encounters. Even more important is that, many years after independence, nearly all African countries require foreign investment and philanthropy for even the most basic of needs. This is yet another indictment of a lack of agency. It has been pointed out that most African countries have enough wealthy citizens who can take large-scale contracts of the kind that we see

Chinese, Indian, Brazilian and other investors taking up. Agency would be at play if we saw some of the dollar billionaires in African countries take up projects such as road construction and housing, sectors that have been dominated by Global South powers for at least over 25 years now, that is, since the early 2000s.

The rise of the Global South has meant a need for increased attention by African leaders and bureaucrats responsible for foreign affairs. Some scholars hold that Africa's joining of an increasing number of organisations is a demonstration of increased agency and a prominent role to play in global affairs (Lopes 2025). The alternative view is that African countries are beginning to spread themselves too thin in their membership and involvement in Global South organisations, as well as in the summits associated with them (Soulé 2021; Wekesa 2024; Usman 2025). An abbreviated unpacking of this development is worthwhile.

Putatively, all the 54 African countries are members of the NAM and the G77. This is putative because such membership is ill-defined and only gained some measure of credibility when Uganda hosted the summits in 2024. In other words, the membership of African countries in the NAM and the G77 is loose, non-binding, and ambivalent. In the year before the Kampala summits, South Africa had hosted a BRICS summit during which two African countries, Ethiopia and Egypt, joined. Since then, Uganda, Nigeria, Algeria and Zimbabwe have joined what is now known as the BRICS Plus, as BRICS partner countries. Reportedly, more African countries are lining up to join the BRICS. Thus far, we see that African countries are members of three Global South international formations.

At the same time, Muslim-majority African countries in northern Africa and the Horn of Africa are members of Middle East formations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the League of Arab States (LAS), and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). This brings the number of Global South international organisations in which some African countries are members to six, not counting other less prominent ones. Indeed, Gulf States and Turkey have refined push strategies towards the continent in a massive form in recent years (see African Centre for Strategic Studies 2025). In eastern Africa alone, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Turkey now challenge the previous

dominance of China (even though China remains the country with the highest stock of capital projects). The Gulf Cooperation Council and the League of Arab States are two organisations that provide an umbrella for the socialisation of several African nations in Global South impulses. Importantly, we see that the Middle East, also known as West Asia, is in some respects in competition with other global powers, China and India, for instances with Africa as the stomping ground.

The new push by Gulf States follows East Asian power in Africa. Most, if not all, African countries have signed cooperation agreements with several Global South powers. These include China–Africa, Indonesia–Africa, India–Africa and Brazil–Africa. Each of these relationships comes with periodic summits, jamborees during which the Global South powers articulate their own strategies towards the continent under the guise of mutually beneficial relationships. This plethora of Africa+1 organisations has raised concerns about the capacity of African countries to navigate the intricate agendas of the global powers towards them. One starts to lose count of the Global South formations into which African nations are drawn when one considers the institutionalised Africa+1 summitry and their established mechanisms. Metaphorically speaking, African countries are being courted by too many suitors, to a point where they gaze in multiple directions all at once. Yet Africa should ideally be the one calling the shots in such relations, given its demographic and geographic weight, its national sovereignty in terms of number of states, and its substantial natural resource endowments.

Non-alignment and Africa in the Global South

Non-alignment is a major theme in Global South–Africa relations. However, it raises pertinent questions. What, for instance, is the NAM aligned with, and what is it aligned against? How is Africa aligned with the NAM and G77? What if there are levels of misalignment between Africa and its wealthier Global South partners?

The NAM traces its roots to the Bandung Conference of 1955, with its formative members assuming the position of non-alignment vis-à-vis the dominant bipolar powers of the USA and the then USSR.

The establishment of the G77 in 1964 was predicated on the push for the full decolonisation of world territories then still under the thumb of imperialism. Only a handful of territories in Africa are still under European control, namely the French Réunion and Mayotte, the Spanish Ceuta, Melilla and Canary Islands, the British Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, and the Portuguese Madeira. The African Union should make up its mind on the territories that are geographically in Africa, but administratively in Europe. This is a subject for another discussion, given that the current chapter is focused on Africa in the Global South. The relevant point for this chapter is that there is a great need to reengineer African priorities in the NAM and the G77, since the continent is under a semblance of self-rule.

Nostalgia is such that instead of forging forward, many of the discussions at the Global South convenings such as the NAM and the G77 focus on the past (Dalay 2025). African member states in the NAM should rethink their stance, given that the communism–socialism versus capitalism–liberalism ideologies of the post-World War era have shifted dramatically (see Serunkuma 2024). African leaders can play a pivotal role in revamping the NAM to align it to current realities because many of the problems that afflicted the continent in the past – wars, diseases and poverty – still exist today, while many NAM member states today grapple with a different set of problems (see Wekesa and Khadiagala 2024). In essence, therefore, the circumstances that informed the establishment of the NAM have changed, but the rhetoric has remained largely the same.

The notion of non-alignment of yore has come under intense scrutiny in recent times. An agential African perspective should consider a strategic dis-alignment approach in which its leaders step back to carefully consider their involvement in the non-aligned movement. A key question in such a strategic retreat would be, 'What are we doing in the non-aligned movement specifically and in the Global South more broadly?' Such reflection would allow for a return to some of the Global South formations with clearer, self-interested points of negotiation.

It would be important that Uganda, presumably representing African thoughts on the NAM, should work in concert with institutions such as the African Union to change the focus of the NAM, from heavy ideology-

driven agendas to positions that advance African economic renewal interests.

African agency in the Global South

What exactly do we mean when we liberally invoke the phrase 'African agency' in discussions and debates around the need for Africa to act rather than be acted on? How is African agency applicable in the 'Africa in the Global South' dynamics? How would African agency be interpreted in the Global South? How would African agency be used in considering issues such as the much-vaunted reform of multilateral and multipolar institutions to more closely reflect African aspirations?

A two-pronged framework can start us off in attempts to make sense of this bifurcated question: The agential potential and agential realities. Applying this framework can yield any number of exemplifications. Two will suffice at this stage: geopolitical competition and demographics. On the geopolitical front, the fact that Africa has become a key theatre of geopolitical competition (see Wekesa 2025) is proof that the continent has latent agential power, whether in terms of its resources or the fact that it is home to the largest bloc of UN member states. One can insert into this many other forces of attraction that draw Global South powers (and Global North powers) to Africa. On the flip side, geopolitical rivalry on the continent is reaching such a frenzied level, characterised as a new scramble for Africa, that African agency is battered into smithereens. This is where a collective approach to African agency becomes essential, rather than one in which individual nations invoke national sovereignty (for instance Scialoja 2025) in dealing with China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil, the Gulf States and others.

In the second example, Africa's agential potential can be seen in its population boom, often framed by optimists as a huge youth bulge which is also a dividend (see de Carvalho et al. 2019). The magic figure of an African population surging to 2.5 billion in 2050, representing 25% of the world total, has become omnipresent in most policy, academic and journalistic fare. The narrative is that Africa's population will supersede that of the current single-nation population-based Asian powers of India

and China. Diametrically, however, failure to harness the youth bulge as a resource can lead to a youth burst, the understanding being that restive youth can turn into an adverse force.

From a Global South perspective, many years after Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, issued his clarion call for African unity (see Kanu 2013), African countries are not working in union in a changing Global South. Nkrumah's brand of Pan-Africanism is today more or less dead, such that the involvement of African nations based on unity is nearly untenable. This is evident in the fact that many of the common positions adopted by the African Union have not been followed through. As Tieku (2014) puts it, the 'out-in' African agency approach, which sees global powers – including Global South powers – define the terms of engagement, often trumps adherence to African positions. Such is the state of dereliction in non-implementation of the African common positions that today many everyday Africans cannot articulate any of the positions. If African agency is the capability of Africans to chart their own course and pursue their own causes (see Murithi 2014), then the phrase begins to run threadbare considering that African interests are driven not just by the Global North powers, but also by some of the Global South powers.

It is indeed probable that Africans could begin to amplify their voices on critical issues, such as the exporting of raw materials and illicit financial flows, with their Global South partners. Increasingly, the policies, treaties and agreements shaping the contours of Africa's engagement in the Global South emanate from the Global South powers. This is what Murithi (2014) refers to as a 'top-down' approach. This would begin to give vent to the notion of the 'Africa we want', as eloquently spelled out in the AU's Agenda 2063 and its ten-year implementation plans.

In the literature, a mollifying narrative is that we can talk of the agency of weak states even as we take cognisance of the agential assets of strong states. From the perspective of Africa in the Global South, African nations therefore have some leverage over their more powerful counterparts (Brown and Herman 2013; Chipaike and Knowledge 2018).

Even as we take critical stances on Agenda 2063, we still appreciate that it is perhaps the best idea that ever came from the AU. Notably,

the word 'agenda' in Agenda 2063 is the essence of African agency. The Agenda talks of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa that acts as a dynamic force in the international arena. These are ideals most people would not argue against. Indeed, from this perspective, it is thought that Africans have quite some agency in world politics, the Global South included. One scholar asserts that 'African actors [have] established a sustained track record of assertive, high-level diplomacy and [that] … the continent has seen long-term economic growth' (Brown and Herman 2013).

Against the multiplicity of definitions of African agency, these ideals should serve as a call to collective, unified action in such a way that everyday Africans buy into and support underlying projects that support such visions. Agenda 2063 is indeed a grand vision. However, grand visions easily turn into grandiose nightmares if they fail to rise to the promise. African leaders are given to lofty narratives of the continent's progress, drawing on Agenda 2063 and regional economic community plans. Such sentiments are often orchestrated by the leaders, leaving the citizens at best second-guessing and at worst ignorant and unconcerned by development agendas.

If African citizens are to be more involved in the African agency agenda, some revolutionary approaches must be considered. This is what Brown and Harman (2013) refer to as a 'bottom-up' approach to African agency. For instance, what would happen if African citizens were involved, in some form or shape, in the election of the Pan-African Parliament? Would that encourage greater involvement of African citizens in the African agency project? Would the involvement of citizens in the election or nomination of the African Union Commission officials make this continental body more accountable?

African intellectuals also often discuss the lost opportunity in focused development that has seen African countries stagnate as their Asian Tiger counterparts progress from low economic bases to global competitiveness (see, for instance, Abdulrasheed and Aminu 2021). The Asian Tigers, namely Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, considered models for the Global South, are said to have been at the same level of development as countries like Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda

in the 1960s. If Agenda 2063 is to be achieved, there will be a need for African thinkers to carefully consider the factors that propelled the Asian Tigers into 'successful economy' status. It will likely be realised that state capture in Africa has served to constrain the achievement of the kinds of aspirations that read so eloquently in the numerous blueprints that have been produced for decades.

While indeed the blame should to some extent fall on some of the Global South powers and their strategies to exploit a weak Africa, agency demands that the blame should lie with the African Union and the five regional economic communities. A case in point is the Democratic Republic of Congo, where a couple of issues evince Africa's lack of agency. A decades-long conflict in the resource-endowed country recently burst into an all-out conflict in its eastern reaches, drawing in M23 rebels, Rwanda, and, to a lesser extent, Uganda. The most probable effort towards conflict resolution was initiated in early 2025 by the United States through the good offices of a Global South power, Qatar (see Amare and Vandome 2025). Framed as 'transactional', the peace deal is an instance of a great power (the US) working with a Global South power (Qatar) in Africa – a development that can be analysed further on another occasion.

The DRC–US–Qatari peace deal in the DRC is problematic for African agency on several fronts. First, the fact that the African Union (AU), the East African Community (EAC), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) have not been able to pacify the DRC is a huge indictment of their agential diplomatic capacities (see Kilian 2025). Second, and perhaps more important in terms of the 'Africa in the Global South' theme, Qatar's involvement is seen as an active pursuit of conflict resolution in ways that shove aside African efforts (Dudouet 2025). It is not an overstatement to say that outside forces have their own agendas in the DRC conflict. The motivations for the Global South powers in the DRC are driven by a proclivity to gain from DRC's vast natural resources, including the increasingly significant critical and rare earth minerals. If you replace the DRC with any other resource-rich African nation, you see the same Global South power calculus in Africa.

In its most glib form, 'African agency' is often bandied about as

'Africa acting' rather than 'being acted upon'. In a related view, African agency is seen as a 'view of international relations that begins somewhere (Africa) other than with the great powers' (Global South powers) (Brown and Harman 2013). A closer look shows that agency should be seen from multiple dimensions. In the Global South perspective, the political dimension of African agency would include African leaders taking more principled positions when dealing with their counterparts. At the same time, African citizens would be exercising political agency if they held their leaders to account on their dealings with Global South counterparts on any number of issues. At the institutional agency level, it is patent that some of the factors that have propelled Global South powers include a keen focus on meritocracy and the development of the critical skills necessary for leadership, governance and technical capabilities in productive sectors. Woefully, Africa lacks and lags in almost all these institutional domains. Economic agency constitutes a critical agential dimension. The paradox is that Africa is wealthy in latent ways but has not mustered the agency to convert potential to reality. It is for lack of agency in the economic dimension that observers often lament the exploitation of African resources by Global South powers.

Amplifying African voices in the Global South

What would be the link between African agency and the amplification of African voices? Amplifying African voices is a key aspect of African agency. In turn, media writ large, including news media, cultural industries and digital tech, constitute the aspects that go into any region's megaphone.

A historical perspective provides an entry point into appreciating the amplification of African voices in the Global South as a segue into African agency in the Global South. African media should be on a par with counterparts in the Global South, *ceteris paribus*. In the context of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) of the 1970s and 1980s (McBride 1980), most countries in today's Global South, then known as the Third World, suffered huge media inequalities with their Global North counterparts. The Third World campaigned vigorously

through the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) for resources to enable equal access to communication capabilities (Cavanagh 1989: 354; Akuta 2001; Wekesa 2023). These included satellite technologies that were critical for the transmission of media content via radio, television and films. The Global North, under US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, ensured that the UNESCO-sanctioned reform of the global communication affordances did not go beyond the McBride Report, also known as *Many Voices One World* (McBride 1980).

Despite the Global North's opposition, UNESCO was critical to either the establishment or initiation of continental media, particularly the Union of National Radios and Televisions of Africa (URTNA) and the Pan-African News Agency (PANA), for print media. These two outlets have been closed due to a lack of support by African governments. Left with no state-supported continental media outlet transmitting content within and outside the world, Africa, for the most part, relies on external media outlets for international media. The Global South countries of China, India, Qatar and, to some extent Brazil – countries that identified with the struggle for balanced communication – have today climbed up the ladder in terms of projecting their voices not just within their countries and regions, but also to Africa. In terms of communicating African agency via amplification of voices, therefore, Africa has been left nearly mute, and to say that Africa is voiceless is perhaps an exaggeration, but not too far from the fact.

For decades, the most prominent outlets that broadcast from and to the continent were the USA's CNN, UK's BBC, and France's Radio France International. For various reasons, several Global South countries have entered the African media sphere. Chinese media outlets made a massive entry onto the continent in the early 2010s, flexing their muscle by beaming onto the continent through the China Global Television Network, Xinhua News Agency, China Radio International and China Daily (see Wekesa 2017). The rise of Chinese media in Africa means the amplification of Chinese voices in Africa. This is the essence of the public diplomacy and soft power roles of Global South media in Africa

(see Wekesa 2017a; Wekesa 2017b). The Qatari broadcaster Al Jazeera has, since the 2000s, consolidated its presence in the Middle East and expanded its reach into Africa.

Interestingly, these media outlets have been framed as challenging Western dominance in African media. From an African agency perspective, this is a mistaken framing, because Africans would be better off developing their own media rather than choosing between Global North- or Global South-driven media. If the theory of de-Westernisation (see, for instance, Li and Wekesa 2023) underlies the proclivity for the creation of global media in parts of the Global South, then 'de-Global-Southation' is a germane proposition for Africa.

A large factor in the amplification of African voices will have to include innovative ways of creating continent-wide media outlets, even if they are based on the Global North-owned social media platforms. If media in its broad sense is an agenda-setter, then we can conclude that African agendas on the global stage are largely set by outsiders. In the past, these agenda-setters were Global North media outlets. Today, several Global South media platforms have joined in as Africa's agenda-setters. If the media are the framers of issues in the international sphere, then African issues are for the most part framed by global media, including those from the Global South power countries. If the media represents people and issues, the representation of African issues in the international sphere is through the eyes of Global North and, increasingly, Global South power representers. This volume explicitly and implicitly discusses the complexities of the binaries reflected in how other actors perceive the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa positions itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South.

The chapters in the volume are segmented into three main categories: Intra-Africa-focused chapters; Geopolitics-focused chapters, and Thematic chapters.

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CHAPTER 2

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA): Advancing African Agency or Amplifying Neo-imperial Interests?

Julius Niringiyimana
Makerere University, Uganda

Introduction

Regional economic integration (REI) is one of the pillars of development strategies undertaken by both the Global North and the Global South to advance their agency and amplify their voices. In a way, this move reflects the globalisation pretension of establishing a 'world without poverty' (Oloruntoba and Nshimbi 2023). The World Bank, which is among the global organisations that Stiglitz (2002) calls 'the governors of globalization', states its mission thus: 'Our dream is a world free of poverty' (World Bank 2019). To achieve this dream, 'the governors of globalization' encouraged the establishment of free-regulating markets, liberal policies and a set of instruments and programmes that would enable free movement of goods and services. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is one of the free trade areas that African Union (AU) member states created in May 2019 to foster greater intracontinental trade and investment. As such, 54 out of 55 AU member states have signed a framework agreement establishing the AfCFTA to promote economic integration and growth in Africa (Niringiyimana and Rwengabo 2025; Kiiza 2023). The agreement focuses on the implementation and phased negotiation of various commitments to reduce or eliminate tariffs, prospectively including up to 97 per cent of all tariff lines and non-tariff barriers to trade. The AfCFTA covers a region with a joint gross domestic product of approximately US$3.4 trillion and a potential market of about 1.4 billion people.

This move is historically important for advancing African agency (asserting African autonomy, self-determination and control over African affairs) for three reasons. First, AfCFTA is the largest free-trade area globally in terms of the number of participating states since the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (World Bank 2020). Second, it represents the boldest attempt to promote Afrocentricity and a new face of African unity that ideologically facilitates the vision of African problems being solved by African solutions. This ideology – what Baldwin (2012) calls the 'discourse of futurity' – underpins AfCFTA, and can be seen as a move against imperialism. Lastly, the AfCFTA reflects the African Agenda 2063, a master plan for Africa to transform the continent into what the AU (2019) considers to be 'a global powerhouse in the future'. The AU notes that AfCFTA feeds into Agenda 2063, which is a strategic framework for Africa that aims to deliver on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development. This move is a manifestation of the pan-African drive for self-determination, freedom and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance (African Union 2019). Ighobor (2020) explains that the AfCFTA Secretary-General supported this idea by stating that Africa continues to be trapped in a colonial economic model, which requires that Africans need to aggressively implement the AfCFTA as one of the means of achieving fundamental structural transformation of Africa's economy. Ighobor advises that African countries have to take action now to dismantle this colonial economic model. We see that economic complexities of the binaries reflect how bigger economies perceive the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa prefers to or actually locates itself in the power shifts and fixes.

Undeniably, the African political economy has been lagging, compared to other countries, especially in the Global North. In his conceptualisation of Africa using international political economy perspective, Niringiyimana (2025) explains how in 2020 only 17 per cent of African exports were heading to other African states. This is significantly low compared with other intraregional trade shares, such as 30 per cent in North America, 61 per cent in Asia and 68 per cent in Europe. As such, the World Bank (2020) estimates that the implementation of the AfCFTA could increase

intra-African trade by 81 per cent, elevate Africa-wide real income by 7 per cent (US$450 billion) and improve the standard of living of about 30 million people in the next 15 years (World Bank 2020). Other scholars, such as Tralac (2019) and Shinyekwa and Bulime (2020), share the same optimism that AfCFTA has the potential to promote employment, industrial linkages, economic diversification and structural transformation in Africa.

These remarks reveal the importance of establishing the AfCFTA as a means of challenging neo-imperial powers through rethinking and (re)igniting the long-term African initiatives. As Bedjaoui (2019) explains, the AfCFTA will support the decolonising of the 'fictitious political independence and effective economic subordination which neocolonialism and imperialism maintained in Africa'. Moreover, the AfCFTA potentially presents an opportunity to transform Africa's role in global trade from export of primary commodities to competitive diversification of its exports (Niringiyimana and Rwengabo 2025). These submissions indicate that the AfCFTA is probably the means for Africa to amplify its voices and achieve its agency in the world.

Nonetheless, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (2021) is concerned that much will depend on African political will and the management of AfCFTA investment protocol. Moreover, various challenges affecting the African continent may limit the AfCFTA in delivering the desired outcomes. Kiiza (2023) summarises African trade challenges as follows: First, it is a continent still struggling with structural challenges to economic integration, such as infrastructure deficits like standard gauge railways and information and communication technology. Second, it is a continent whose economy and trade is underpinned by mono-economies, primary commodities and the informal sector. This implies that Africa has fewer competitive advantages compared to the Global North and other countries in the Global South with manufactured goods. Third, weak governance in African states characterised by political instability, corruption and perpetual conflicts affect free movement of goods. Fourth, the dominance of neo-imperialism in AfCFTA exerts pressure on the AU to implement orthodox market-oriented ideologies. This creates unequal exchange due to asymmetrical power relations in

international trade. It also interferes with the African desire to have the 'Africa we want' through 'African solutions to African problems'. The ways in which neo-imperialism disrupts AfCFTA processes – and thereby constrains Africa's efforts to advance its agency and amplify its voice – form the core of this discussion.

At the centre of the paper is a critical analysis of how neo-imperial states weaponise the AfCFTA to amplify their global economic interests in Africa. To advance this, I demonstrate how global powers have influenced AfCFTA leadership to adapt and implement conventional market ideologies that amplify imperial interests, contrary to pragmatic and strategic trade that would enable AfCFTA to advance African agency. I explain how the global integrationist ideology underpinned by global free-regulating trade is part of the WTO and advanced by the 'governors of globalization', such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to enable powerful economies to dominate the international political economy. I show how global free-regulating trade encourages the AfCFTA to homogenise its trade policies, in the way it is done in the advanced economies and to the detriment of AU member states, whose economies are still weak and at varying development stages.

In the process, I demonstrate that neo-imperialism unfolds through financing AfCFTA programmes under the pretext of promoting capacity building and guiding the AfCFTA policy agenda. I argue that lack of financial capacity on the side of the AU has made AfCFTA vulnerable to neo-imperialism. I also reveal that different workshops and training sessions offered by the imperial powers are manifestations of altering the initial Afrocentric logic that African leaders had when establishing AfCFTA, so that orthodox neoliberal ideologies are enforced. Finally, I submit that meaningful advancement of African agency requires the formation of a 'United States of Africa (USAfrica)' to ensure that economic nationalism based on strategic and pragmatic trade is implemented.

These articulations were approached using qualitative desk review and interrogation of literature from various sources. Specifically, journal articles, books and official reports on the African Union, AfCFTA and other regional integration documents were analysed and interpreted

to understand the main question of this chapter. The discussion is thematically organised into six sub-sections. The introduction is followed by an analysis of regional economic integration in advancing African agency. The third and fourth sections articulate the focus of AfCFTA and the neo-imperial interests in AfCFTA. The fifth section documents the manifestations of neo-imperialism in the operationalisation of AfCFTA, and the last section concludes the paper with the way forward.

Regional economic integration as a means for advancing African agency

African attempts to advance its agency have been combined around the vision of pan-African aspiration and solidarity espoused in Afrocentrism logic. Mangeni and Calestous (2019) document how the aim of pan-African aspiration was to 'provide [a] solution for structural injustices that have long marginalised the Global South through establishing a new international economic order'. In the same vein, Ismail (2021) explains how the protest of the unjust global trade order encouraged African leaders to rethink regional integration. This was viewed as an opportunity to establish regional economic structures and reshape the international order that would gradually advance African agency and amplify its voices. However, the ideological foundation that pan-Africanism employed has been a theatre of rigorous contestation. Therefore, other integration replicas were developed and analysed in order to understand the most appropriate ideological position for AfCFTA to enable it to advance African agency.

The first was the traditional approach, which followed a linear progression to regional integration. This approach to integration and trade liberalisation was developed by David Viner in the 1950s. Ismail (2017) documents how this approach 'proposes a step-wise progression from "preferential trade agreements" to "free trade areas" to "customs union" to "common market" and lastly to a "monetary union"'. Despite its advantages, this model was criticised as being inappropriate and inadequate for a nuanced approach to Africa's development challenges that would advance its position to the global level.

As a result, African states espoused a 'state-led approach to development' and regional integration. Ismail (2021) avers that this approach was aimed at creating the means to avoid overdependence on the advanced economies and the international economic order. It therefore emphasised import substitution industries, driven by state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and protectionism to promote development (Akinkugbe 2020). However, Akokpari (2008) shows that, by the 1980s, the state-led approach to development and regional integration had been discredited, discarded and replaced by what Murphy (2024) calls 'neoliberal open regionalism'.

As such, from the 1980s onwards, neoliberalism was identified as the solution to poor development outcomes in the Global South. It needs to be highlighted that the nature of the policies in the neoliberal-driven regional integration resulted in the notion of 'open regionalism' (Ismail 2017). In this approach, states are encouraged to open their national economies to the international market through free trade, trade liberalisation and liberal economic rules. Therefore, Akinkugbe (2020) asserts that 'open regionalism' advocated the 'linear integration of national and regional economies into the global economy with emphasis on export-led growth'. The implication is that 'open regionalism' requires limited government in economic intervention; and that it emphasises private property rights, the abandonment of the welfare state, and encourages monetary and fiscal discipline.

After two decades of implementation, opponents such as Lee (2002) highlight that, instead of improving African economies and advancing its agency, neoliberalism through 'open regionalism' led to further marginalisation of African economies. Evidence shows that intra-African trade did not increase significantly, and African markets were flooded by cheaper, unauthentic manufactured goods from developed economies. Legodi (2024) names these unauthentic cheap goods, which mostly bear a 'Made in China' label, as 'zhing-zhongs' and 'fong-kongs'. Lee (2002) shows how, in a self-reflective critique, the World Bank admitted that 'its policies and programmes in Africa during the 1980s and 1990s had gone too far and were too narrow in focus'. These scholars point out that the effect of open regionalism was the closure of some local industries, leading to de-industrialisation in Africa. They also reveal

how the objectives of the Abuja Treaty to create the African Economic Community (AEC) were undermined. These policies dismantled state-led development by promoting privatisation and maintaining commodity export. The implication is that building social capital through human development and innovation was ignored. These challenges show how open regionalism shackled African economies and limited them in their pursuit of their own policy and ideological direction.

In a manner that continues the domination of neo-colonialism and imperialism in African political economy, Akokpari (2008) reveals how some advanced economies manoeuvred through another technology of power – that is, a mechanism used to maintain influence – known as the External Guarantor Model (EGM). Through the lens of EGM's neo-imperial agenda, for instance, France has continued to cling to its influence in West Africa. To be sure, the currency of West African states is pegged to the Euro, and the monetary reserves are held by the Banque de France. It needs to be highlighted that the IMF and World Bank play a superintendent role in the process. This state of affairs invariably entails disturbing and pauperising conditions that limit the amplification of African voices. Like open regionalism, EGM restricts Africa's policy options because external pressure is exerted on Africa to follow policies that satisfy the guarantor's preferences even when they go against African aspirations. This implies that EGM is an inappropriate ideological stance for regional integration in Africa.

To right the wrongs of the above state of affairs, other theorists have advocated for a multidimensional approach by employing development integration theory and its evolved successor, 'developmental regionalism' (Ismail 2021). Ismail points out that these concepts incorporate the need to adopt a regional integration approach founded on 'heterodox economic theory'. This idea resonates with solidarity as a crucial principle of African regional economic integration. Moreover, Ismail confirms how development integration resonates with the need for both macro- and micro-coordination in a multi-sectoral approach through endorsing production, infrastructure and trade. The aim is to achieve an equitable balance to regional integration through 'regional industrial development'.

Drawing on the framework of Davies and the United Nations

Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Ismail identifies four key interconnected pillars of 'developmental regionalism'. These are (a) fair trade integration, (b) transformative industrialisation, (c) cross-border infrastructure and trade facilitation, and (d) cooperation on promoting democracy, good governance, and peace and security. It needs to be added that developmental regionalism stresses cooperation and collaboration among countries in a broader range of areas beyond just trade and trade facilitation. In this respect, economies are encouraged to collaborate in areas of regional infrastructure, industrial development, research, investment and information-sharing. Thus, it reflects the heterogeneity of approaching development. This enables the rearrangement of the African economy by building strong regional manufacturing capacity to compete in global markets and establishing competitive regional value chains (CRVCs). This is timely in Africa, with its 54 countries, including 16 landlocked and 34 that the United Nations (UN) classifies as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). It needs to be added that landlocked countries face unique challenges in advancing their agency, as they are isolated from global markets. They experience high transit costs, which hamper their socioeconomic development (Ismail 2018). For instance, it is estimated that landlocked countries in the Global South spend almost twice as much of their export income on transport and insurance services versus coastal developing countries, and three times as much as developed economies.

In light of this context, the development of regional infrastructure is necessary to reduce trade costs and amplify trade benefits. It also dictates that imperial roads and trade routes be re-oriented as a means of promoting developmental regionalism. This is because infrastructure established in the colonial period was designed to support the exploitative strategies of the imperialists. The existing infrastructures direct trade out of Africa to the imperial states rather than promoting intra-African trade. Moreover, the colonial partition of Africa worsened the poor connectivity on the continent. Therefore, industrialisation is central to Africa's structural transformation, with infrastructure development being the catalyst. However, these need to be established in the context of developmental regionalism that caters for cooperation on cross-border infrastructure.

This enables the intra-African trade to connect isolated markets to the global economy.

Thus, the ideological and analytical framework for AfCFTA needs to be aligned with the appropriate integration approach. As such, viewing AfCFTA through the lens of a linear comparison to its Global North counterpart has reinforced a narrative of failure. Thus, African regional economic integration (AREI) plans need to be redirected towards a multidimensional approach which encompasses economic, legal, cultural, political and technological objectives. This is to ensure the multidimensional and nuanced nature of African development outcomes that have been ignored by the Global North. What is also ignored is unequal regional development, the legacies of colonialism, neo-imperialism and the informal nature of African economies. These seriously impact the success of AREI and their role in amplifying African voices. Put differently, Africa must pivot away from the Eurocentric institutionalist market-led approach to regional integration and instead adopt the developmental regionalism model as its pillar of regional cooperation.

The above analysis locates AfCFTA within the broader AREI agenda of the AU. It demonstrates that despite some encounters, REI has been high on the African agenda since the independence era. The analysis shows that AfCFTA is itself a consequence of the Abuja Treaty of 1991, which sought to create an African Economic Community (AEC). The Abuja Treaty specifies the sequence through which Africa will create an AEC over a period of 34 years. Article 6 of the Abuja Treaty specifies that 'the Community shall be established gradually in six (6) stages of variable duration over a transitional period not exceeding thirty-four (34) years'. It also implies that AfCFTA resonates with Pan-African ideology that nurtures REI in Africa. In short, the success of AfCFTA depends on how it responds to Afro-realism that speaks to key ideas such as 'African solutions to African problems' and resource nationalism. This African-based epistemology becomes possible by questioning the dominant economic ideologies and epistemologies from the West and reclaiming African perspectives, experiences and knowledge systems that enable Africa to develop a distinctive policy agenda through which AfCFTA can advance African agency. Before these ideas are articulated in detail, in the

subsequent section I argue that the continued domination of imperialism in African affairs makes it unlikely for AfCFTA to advance African agency.

The focus of the AfCFTA

It needs to be noted that the AfCFTA was established by the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. Theoretically, the AfCFTA framework agreement aims to remove trade barriers to intra-African trade and investment through the phased negotiation and implementation of various commitments (Niringiyimana and Rwengabo 2025; Kiiza 2023). In the process, AfCFTA seeks to create a single market for goods, services and capital, and to enable the intra-regional free movement of persons. The AfCFTA also focuses on the diversification of African economies through industrialisation, promotion of services sectors, and innovation (Oloruntoba and Nshimbi 2023). A long-term goal of AfCFTA is 'to lay the foundations for the establishment of a unitary African customs union, which, like the EU, would require a common external tariff structure' (Kiiza 2023). To be precise, Article 6 of the AfCFTA Agreement stipulates that it 'shall cover trade in goods, services, investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy'. This detailed scope highlights the misalignment between the Agreement and country-specific development policy spaces.

Article 5 of the AfCFTA outlines various principles to govern the agreement (Kiiza 2023). First, the free-trade agreements (FTAs) of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) shall serve as the building blocks for the AfCFTA. This implies that the AfCFTA is being used to deepen, rather than question, the global FTAs, which were propagated by the WTO model of trade liberalisation. This means that FTAs are used to embed, not soften, the conventional RECs agenda. Second is variable geometry, which permits a high level of flexibility that ultimately compromises African rules of the game to accommodate neo-imperial interests. Third, special and differential treatment within the AfCFTA has often been structured in ways that ultimately favour Global North interests, particularly by creating incentives aimed at attracting their investment into Africa. Fourth, transparency and disclosure of

information, which disadvantages African commercial secrets, African epistemologies and innovations. Fifth is the preservation of the *acquis,* which implies that earlier levels of trade liberalisation can only be deepened, instead of being uprooted and supplanted with strategic trade in Africa. Sixth is the 'Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) treatment', which defeats the idea of 'flexibility' mentioned under the principle of 'variable geometry'. Seventh is the national treatment of foreign capital, which in essence encourages neo-imperialism. Eighth is reciprocity, which is hard to achieve on the African side because of unequal exchange due to trade in primary commodities and the general mono-economies that underpin African political economies. The last is substantial liberalisation, which calls for the regulation of the free market in ways that function as an imperial mechanism for controlling African political economies.

Taken together, these ideas suggest that the AfCFTA is deeply rooted in free-trade fundamentalism. It reveals how operationalising these principles requires 'the international conventions to be binding on the AU member-states' (Niringiyimana and Rwengabo 2025; Kiiza 2023). This implies that these neoliberal policies seek to entrench the WTO trade style within the African political economy. In other words, dressed up in the robes of African interests, the AfCFTA policies are, at their core, the 'smart industrial policies of advanced capitalist countries' (Kiiza 2023). Yash Tandon (2020) argues that the ideas of 'economic openness', the 'national treatment' of foreign investors, 'transparency' in government procurement and 'non-discrimination between local and foreign companies' are all entrenched into the WTO space by the Global North for their own benefit. Therefore, it is worth noting that the AfCFTA is dressed up in African attire to beautify and entrench the WTO's free-trade policies. These policies tend to strengthen the interests of Western powers rather than strengthening African agency. In the next section, neo-imperial interests that are deep-rooted in AfCFTA are theoretically articulated.

AfCFTA and neo-imperialism: theoretical articulation

As already mentioned, the purpose of AfCFTA may be understood in the

context of what Baldwin (2012) calls the 'discourse of futurity', because it mirrors the struggle against colonialism and imperialism. Put differently, the aims of AfCFTA are in line with the idea of anti-imperialism. Despite this move, evidence from the literature shows that the goals of AfCFTA are intertwined within the neoliberal ideological orientation. This is a continuation of imperialism. This questions how AfCFTA promotes economic and political independence in Africa that in turn advances African agency. Since Africa depends on foreign ideas to advance its agency, it is appropriate to use Booth's words of 'practical impracticality' (Booth 1991), to argue that AfCFTA cannot advance African agency and amplify its voices. To be sure, this argument is developed here below.

To start with the goals, objectives, aims and principles of AfCFTA, evidence reveals that they are based on neoliberal ideological orientations. The purpose of this ideology is to propagate neo-imperial economic and political interests in Africa (Niringiyimana and Rwengabo 2025; Kiiza 2023). It needs to be asserted that this ideological orientation is reinforced in AfCFTA through embedding of the trade standards, policy choices and preferences of economies in the Global North. These economies create unequal exchange with Africa because they have already progressed and transformed into highly competitive economies characterised by industrialisation and digitalisation of the economy. This is contrary to the African agrarian economies, which are highly engaged in primary commodities and the informal sector. This implies that African economies get blocked, instead of being promoted and transformed into agencies of global political economy. It needs to be added that when AfCFTA is driven by these 'Washington consensus parameters', the neo-imperial interests and policy preferences of the Global North are represented, instead of those of Africa. In other words, the interests of powerful industrial and digital economies dominate the WTO space, which works against the interests and values of transforming African political economies.

Moreover, neoliberal policy ideologies propagate the 'globalist integrationist agenda' represented by the global FTAs (Niringiyimana and Rwengabo 2025; Kiiza 2023). This global trade agenda is associated with institutional arrangements that deepen conventional trade practices such as free regulating markets across all nations. These free regulating

markets are underpinned by the following principles: First, the globalist agenda claims 'worldwide convergence' of all economies on the Anglo-American 'norm' of free-market capitalism. Second, it calls for the 'universalisation' of trade policies and development practices across all political economies. This includes both industrial and agrarian, rich and poor, Global North and Global South. Third, it pushes for the 'rapid institutionalisation of free-market fundamentalism'. Fourth, it clai ms that 'full capital account liberalisation' and unregulated trade is a solution to economic transformation in Africa. Fifth, it argues that foreign direct investment (FDI) is the economic salvation of developing economies. These principles do not necessarily work in tandem with developing economies such as those in Africa, which are predominantly characterised by informal sectors. Also, African economies are at different levels of development and so they can neither be homogenised nor converged. This implies that AfCFTA can only advance African agency if it bases its principles on 'Afro-realism' that acknowledge the diversity of African political economy and banks on African values and knowledge rather than a global market agenda that propagates neo-imperialism in Africa.

Also, through the "global integrationist agenda", the AfCFTA is fortified by the WTO principles that were established to serve the imperial interests of the big capitalist economies and their trade diplomats from the Global North. To be sure, the WTO is premised on key principles, namely trade without discrimination; national treatment – implying treating foreigners and locals equally; free trade through lowering trade tariffs and gradual negotiations; promoting transparency; and encouraging fair competition and non-discrimination. The Global North economies tend to popularise these market-based policy spaces in Africa through economic diplomacy. Put differently, representatives and diplomats of the advanced economies tend to mediate their policy preferences through trade diplomacy. This may also involve the use of African elites, who are deployed in African institutions such as the African Economic Commission to operationalise Global North trade policies (Khor 2010). In other words, while the principles of the WTO seem to encourage equal global trade, in reality these practices cannot work in good terms with Africa, for various reasons.

First, fair competition is not possible in Africa when trading with the

Global North, because these parties have unequal trade power relations. As Yash Tandon stipulates, 'trade is war, not benign' (Tandon 2010). This implies that trading parties are at war and that whoever has more power, politically and economically, takes more benefits. Similarly to the WTO, the tariff reductions encouraged under the AfCFTA work well for advanced economies but not for developing economies that rely heavily on taxation. Therefore, while on the face value AfCFTA is the flagship project of the AU and therefore noticeably African, in reality it is a mere representation of a 'global integrationist agenda' for advanced economies to reap from the arrangements of integration. What this means is that the AfCFTA represents the official diplomacy of Africa, since it was passed by African Heads of State. However, the elites of Africa simply acted to entrench the free-trade canon of the WTO and its hegemonic members from the Global North. Thus, the aims, objectives and goals of AfCFTA underpin neo-imperial interests, as they neither originate from the Global South nor promote the values and strategic interests of the Global South.

In addition, the AfCFTA embraces the mainstream trade that stresses economic liberalism, but the market exchange is based on export of primary commodities and God-given comparative advantages to the competitive global marketplace (Niringiyimana 2025). Pierre (1977) and Evans (1976) account that this is disadvantageous to African economies because it promotes unequal exchange in the global market. These scholars explain that owing to the variation in the prices of primary commodities from Africa and manufactured goods from the Global North, Africa is usually placed in the disadvantaged position in the political economy. In other words, African countries end up producing and exchanging goods that are relatively undervalued in exchange for manufactured goods from the Global North which are overvalued. With this, Pierre (1977) draws the analogy that if coffee or cocoa produced in Africa were produced in the Global North, then they would attract much higher prices than they do in Africa.

This condition is further worsened by unequal economic treaties signed between African states and the imperial states. As Niringiyimana and Rwengabo (2025) explain, these unequal treaties and international

laws are usually drafted by imperial powers and forced onto colonised peoples. Some of these treaties include bilateral investment treaties (BiTs) between a state from the advanced economy and a poor economy. For example, Jamaica signed an unequal treaty with the USA. This is also known as the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI). Similarly, Kenya signed a Bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement (BEPA) with the United Kingdom. Under this agreement, Kenya commits to liberalising approximately 83 per cent of its tariff lines for UK goods over a 25-year transition period. This implies that UK manufactured products imported into Kenya will, in time, circulate within the AfCFTA market.

Related to the above is the hegemonic international law under which the AfCFTA Dispute Settlement Mechanism (AfCFTA DSM) is anchored. Niringiyimana and Rwengabo (2025) argue that instead of AfCFTA-DSM being guided by the Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), they are guided by WTO principles attached to the Dispute Settlement Body, the Appellate Body and the panel system. While these principles are praised for enhancing security, predictability and rule of law in intra-African trade, following this dogma could encourage AfCFTA to incline to orthodox market-based principles that may end up hurting the generally weaker African economies. By implication, this condition may undermine the advancement of African agency. Consequently, Niringiyimana and Rwengabo (2025) advise that considering the adaptation of TWAIL in the implementation of AfCFTA would enhance Africa's ability to exert its agency and voice in the international political economy. According to these scholars, TWAIL boosts the voices of marginalised groups in intra-African trade and considers power dynamics in international trade. In the next section, I present the manifestations of neo-imperialism in AfCFTA.

Manifestations of neo-imperialism in AfCFTA

This section analyses how advanced economies have executed their neo-imperial interests in AfCFTA. Neo-imperialists wield their neo-imperial power through financial support to AfCFTA programmes, signing

economic partnership agreements (EPAs) and supporting different trade programmes that feed into AfCFTA. In addition, they provide policy guidelines and mobilise and sensitise African leaders on global economic integration (Cook and Wong 2023). The main neo-imperial actors in AfCFTA include stakeholders such as the USA and European Union in the Global North, and parts of the Global South, especially China, Russia and India. These actors and their actions have influenced the nature of the AfCFTA in a manner that suits imperial trade and foreign policy interests. These issues are analysed below.

First, different neo-imperial states and multinational companies have provided financial support to AfCFTA activities (Cook and Wong 2023). These actions hinder the AfCFTA's ability to advance African agency and, instead, propagate foreign dependence in Africa. Various examples have been cited to verify this claim. First, and generally, Cook and Wong (2023) highlight that trade between China and Africa was estimated to reach US$254 billion in 2021. This amount was nearly four times larger than American trade with Africa, which amounted to US$64 billion. Second, in September 2021, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the United Kingdom and the AfCFTA secretariat to aid in implementation of the AfCFTA (Business and Financial Times (2021). The UKAid Development Tracker (2021) explains that funding for this initiative totalled £35 million between 2021 and 2026. Third, Germany has supported AfCFTA activities through the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), its federal development agency. This has included negotiating preparation and implementation, policy research and advice, as well as stakeholder outreach and training. Evidence reveals that funding for these activities totalled €34.5 million between mid-2020 and mid-2024 (German Corporation for International Cooperation 2021). Fourth, the Canadian government has funded a C$15 million programme implemented by the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) within UNECA to support the development of the AfCFTA (Government of Canada 2021). Fifth, the Danish government has funded a programme worth US$3.8 million to support AfCFTA-implementing institutions within the African Union and UNECA (Danish Foreign Affairs Ministry 2019).

The question, however, is this: if the AfCFTA's activities are financed by foreign powers, how can it leverage its position to amplify African voices and advance African agency? In other words, the financial support to the AfCFTA is intended to influence the policy decisions and actions of African states on how to operationalise the AfCFTA. This is because funding AfCFTA is considered a technology of power extended by the neo-imperial states to limit Africa in its attempts to advance its interests in the global political economy. It also aims to advance the interests of neo-imperial states through creating debt traps from strategic loans. For example, Daly (2017) opines that debt levels in Djibouti are high because China built its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017 and invested in its ports and infrastructure. In Kenya, China's Standard Gauge Railway (CSGR) has faced criticism because of high costs and corruption scandals, which are likely to cause the country to default on its loans (Deborah and Bhalaki 2022). These examples illustrate the advanced economies' privileges of power in controlling AfCFTA arrangements. They show how the advanced economies mediate the political and economic outcomes of the continental trade area through financial manipulations. These outcomes need not be in tandem with the needs and values of Africa.

In addition, advanced economies provide 'capacity building' to African leaders on the process of operationalising the AfCFTA. Advanced economies such as the US and China provide technical support in the form of ad-hoc workshops, training and dialogues. To be sure, in 2019 US and AU representatives signed a joint statement explaining that the 'AfCFTA is a common goal for both US and Africa' (Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) 2019). As a result, the USTR and State Department officials hosted AU Commission officials in 2019 to discuss trade policy approaches and US–AU cooperation in the AfCFTA. The key issues discussed in the meeting included that 'both sides reaffirmed their support for AfCFTA as a strategic means to increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of Africa to US business' (USTR 2021). In addition, the 2019 visit led to US-sponsored workshops in 2020 on intellectual property rights (IPR) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Support (SPS) rules, and digital trade pertaining to AfCFTA negotiations. Although these activities would be seen as fostering AfCFTA implementation

and encouraging US–Africa trade and investment cooperation, these training sessions were aimed at changing the ideological orientation of African leaders. As already noted, the primary goal of the AfCFTA was to promote strategic trade and economic nationalism in Africa as a means of advancing African agency. Nonetheless, the foreign-directed trainings and workshops propagated 'globalist integrationist ideologies' under the orbit of WTO style. Free-regulating ideologies disorient African leaders, thereby failing to advance African interests.

Moreover, the AfCFTA secretariat benefits from agenda-setting and policy development by the advanced economies. These include the AfCFTA's collaboration with the US government to 'work on the planned AfCFTA protocol on the inclusion of women and youth in trade' (USTR 2021). Also, the International Trade Centre (ITC), a multilateral agency which has a joint mandate with the WTO and the UN, established a policy arrangement known as She Trades Africa AfCFTA. This arrangement aims to provide guidelines that build the 'capacity of women-owned businesses to use the AfCFTA'. In addition, the US provides technical advice on policy issues, more particularly on the SPS policy framework and cross-border trade infrastructure projects. These policy-related programmes fall under the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) regional compact initiative. Nonetheless, it needs to be noted that the agenda-setting and policy development initiated by the advanced economies interfere with the functionality of African-initiated policy values. This is because foreign-advanced policy initiatives tend to promote free-trade orthodoxy that does not promote context-specific development values. Moreover, such trade policies dance to the dictates of demand and supply. They also promote capitalist development characterised by what Wade (1990) conceives as the 'invisible hand of the market, instead of visible head of public policy'.

Other than individual states, multiple donor governments and multinational organisations have provided support to the AfCFTA, particularly in tracking its implementation and tariff negotiations (Cook and Wong 2021). The AU launched an African Trade Observatory (ATO) with the EU, to support AfCFTA efforts. This initiative led the EU to

support the AfCFTA with €74 million between 2014 and 2020 (African Union 2021). The European Economic and Social Committee and European Commission reveal that this aid has supported the AfCFTA across various programmes. These include negotiation facilitation, advocacy and country ratification, tariff classification and harmonisation, as well as AfCFTA national implementation strategies (European Economic and Social Committee 2021). Others include 'rules of origin' implementation by African customs services, capacity building, and the creation of regional geographical indications for products.

These findings point to Nunes's notions of 'reality and power' and the 'politics of materialization' (Nunes 2012). Although Nunes explained these ideas in the context of security, I draw their attention to the AfCFTA to impute the role of power in political and economic outcomes. Drawing from ideas of Nunes, Kaweesi (2023) explains how the 'politics of materialization' is about the 'control over privileges of power and how they mediate political and economic outcomes'. Considering the 'materiality of the privileges of power', I contend that the AfCFTA is unable to promote autonomy, self-determination and, thereafter, advance African agency. This is because Africa has less power and is placed in a less privileged position. Consequently, the fragility of the African political economy makes the continent heavily dependent on financial support from the imperial powers. Second, the embeddedness of African institutions with those of free market fundamentalism make local institutions serve the interests of the imperial institutions and powers. Third, the need for foreign funding creates political patronage among African leaders, who collaborate with the hegemonic and imperial leaders from the Global North for 'deal-making', instead of 'rule- and policy-making' in Africa. In short, weak financial capacity, lack of a home-grown ideological orientation and poor governance have continued to make Africa dependent on the Global North. These conditions create asymmetrical relations that place Africa in a disadvantaged position to advance its own initiatives.

As Friedrich List would comment, 'the popular theory of political economy propounding the virtues of free trade, property rights and "unfettered markets" has assumed the status of a "hegemonic political

economy" ideology' (List 1885). Therefore, since neo-imperial funds and ideologies claim higher space in the initiation and enforcement of AfCFTA through donor-driven programmes, the AfCFTA bureaucrats religiously owe their allegiance, their economic wisdom and their political clout to the neo-imperial fraternity. This fraternity is insulated from the local political demands for concrete developmental outcomes. They are then captured by the Washington-based forces of global capitalism and operationalised by the 'governors of globalization'. Through various support mechanisms offered, the advanced economies conduct surveillance on the AfCFTA and enforce compliance with conventional economic policies underpinned by market fundamentalism. In other words, from the hegemonic ideological perspective, African leaders are told that an effective and successful African leader is the one who has successfully paid allegiance to the imperial powers and implemented dictated universalised policies. These conditions have enhanced and sustained pauperisation in Africa, because advanced economies have continued to place themselves in the driving seat of international political economy as African leaders continue to implement policies they did not initiate.

Conclusion and the way forward

The main question pursued in this chapter was whether the AfCFTA advances African agency or amplifies neo-imperial interests. I demonstrated that advanced economies weaponise the AfCFTA to amplify their economic and political dominance to the disadvantage of AfCFTA. They use *economic* and *political* complexities of the binaries to shape how Africa is perceived – and even the way Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes. To prove this, I argued that global powers influenced AfCFTA leadership to adapt and implement conventional market ideologies, contrary to pragmatic and strategic trade that would enable the AfCFTA to advance African agency. This 'global integrationist ideology', underpinned by global free-regulating trade is part of WTO-aligned policies advanced by the 'governors of globalization' to enable powerful economies to dominate the international

political economy. As discussed within these ideas, the AfCFTA was encouraged to universalise its trade policies, like the WTO does, to the detriment of AU member states and the AfCFTA itself. Therefore, the discussion shows how neo-imperialism unfolds through financing AfCFTA programmes under the pretext of promoting capacity building and guiding the AfCFTA policy agenda. Based on this state of affairs, it is concluded that lack of financial capacity on the side of the AU has made the AfCFTA vulnerable to neo-imperialism through overreliance on the more powerful economies' funds and ideas. This was manifested in the form of workshops and training offered at different stages. These trainings altered the initial Afrocentric logic and 'Afro-realism' that underpinned the commencement of the AfCFTA. Stated differently, the AfCFTA cannot advance African agency, because it lacks capacity to determine its own policies and declarations. It also heavily depends on advanced economies for financial support to operationalise its different programmes.

Therefore, the way forward is: if African countries are to benefit from the AfCFTA, they need to engage partners of their own political, military and economic size. Equal partnerships are mutually beneficial to FTAs. An example is the FTA between the USA and the European Union. In such situations, the symmetrical power relations of these political entities rule out the possibility of one actor bulldozing their trade partner.

Also, the AU needs to consider the importance of forming a United States of Africa (USAfrica) as the institutional space for regulating, coordinating and guiding an AfCFTA that would fundamentally advance African agency. Moreover, African leaders need to have political buy-in and get ready to push politics and economics concurrently. This would enable Africa to 'build the Africa we want together'. A USAfrica would enable the building of strong political institutional arrangements that eventually promote firm alliances and partnerships among different trade partners – which are essential for advancing African agency and amplifying African voices.

Lastly, economic nationalism underpinned by pragmatism and strategic trade need to be adopted in the AfCFTA to advance African agency. Chang (2002) and Kiiza (2023) aver that economic nationalism is strategic in nature, engaging in selected activities and regulating

foreign exchange and capital flow. They highlight how the approach pushes for distinctive national industrial policies and calls for politically constructed competitive advantages. Policy issues considered include state emphasis on industrial manufacturing, digital economy and other politically constructed competitive advantages as drivers of meaningful global market integration. Achieving this requires transformative state involvement in capitalist development, which involves the use of state power, domestic institutions and public resources to build development-enhancing infrastructure. It also requires a skilled labour force and shifting economic actors from low-productivity activities to high value-added economic activities.

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CHAPTER 3

Addressing Ethnic Diversity: Pragmatic Approaches for Fostering Inclusive Dialogue and Voice Amplification within the African Union

Japheth Musau Kasimbu
Program Management Specialist, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Djibouti

Introduction

In this chapter, the intricate problem of ethnic diversity within the African Union (AU) – with an emphasis on workable strategies to promote inclusive discourse and elevate voices from a range of ethnic backgrounds – is examined. Although there is a great deal of cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity on the African continent, these differences can cause problems with social cohesion, representation and government. These ethnocentric perspectives inform the Western-centric perspectives through which the Western complexities of the binaries are shaped. The West exploits the ethnocentric perspectives to enable Western countries to shape how they locate Africa in relation to Africa's desire to locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South. An ethnically disintegrated group is easier to penetrate than a coherent one.

The overview starts out by placing ethnic diversity in the AU into context and recognising the historical influences, colonial legacies and current processes that define ethnic relations on the continent. The section highlights how important it is for the AU to embrace variety as a source of strength rather than as a source of divisiveness.

This chapter emphasises how important it is to comprehend and deal with ethnic diversity in a way that promotes inclusivity and gives voice to underrepresented groups within the AU framework.

The narrative begins by recognising the diverse range of cultures,

languages and ethnic groups that make up the African continent and stressing the value of embracing difference as a strength rather than a cause for conflict. The researcher recognises the difficulties and complexities that come with leading a diverse community by identifying the historical, sociocultural and political elements that have shaped ethnic relations within the AU, a continental body that is ethnically fragmented and lacks a unified agency in the Global South platform.

The overview also presents achievable strategies for resolving issues stemming from ethnic diversity within the AU, with an emphasis on promoting inclusive discourse and elevating the voices of various ethnic groups. One of these strategies is to create forums for inclusive discourse where representatives of various ethnic groups can convene to exchange grievances, goals and concerns. The overview also emphasises the significance of media techniques, capacity-building programmes and cultural exchange programmes in fostering empathy, deference and representation for minority ethnic groups inside the AU.

In the end, this chapter promotes an all-encompassing and comprehensive strategy for resolving ethnic difference within the AU, stressing the value of communication, inclusion and social cohesion in creating a more resilient and inclusive continent. Within the framework of the AU, the chapter seeks to promote social justice, peace and sustainable development via research grounded in evidence and practical solutions.

Objectives

This chapter aims to explore pragmatic approaches for fostering inclusive dialogue and amplifying diverse voices within the AU. The specific objectives are:

1. To analyse the historical, sociocultural and political factors influencing ethnic diversity within the AU and their impact on governance and representation.
2. To examine the challenges and opportunities associated with ethnic diversity in the AU and its member states.
3. To propose inclusive dialogue mechanisms that can facilitate

constructive engagement among diverse ethnic groups within AU frameworks.

4. To evaluate the role of media, cultural exchange programmes and capacity-building initiatives in promoting representation, empathy and social cohesion among ethnic communities.
5. To provide policy recommendations for the AU to enhance inclusivity, equitable representation and sustainable development through ethnic diversity management.

Scope

This chapter focuses on ethnic diversity within the institutional framework of the AU and its broader impact on governance, representation and social cohesion. It examines how ethnic diversity shapes political and social structures across AU member states, with particular emphasis on regions where ethnic diversity has significantly influenced governance and policy-making. By analysing ethnic relations within the AU, the chapter seeks to highlight both the challenges and opportunities associated with fostering inclusivity in a multi-ethnic context. A key area of focus is the historical legacies, sociocultural dynamics and political structures that have shaped ethnic relations within the AU. The chapter explores how colonial histories, post-independence governance models and contemporary political developments have influenced ethnic representation and participation. It also examines the role of policy interventions, dialogue mechanisms and media strategies in fostering inclusivity and mitigating ethnic tensions. By assessing the effectiveness of these strategies, the chapter aims to provide insights into how the AU can strengthen its institutional capacity for managing ethnic diversity.

Additionally, the chapter takes into account both historical and contemporary perspectives, analysing past challenges and presenting efforts while proposing future strategies for improving ethnic inclusivity within AU governance structures. Special attention is given to how inclusive dialogue platforms, capacity-building programmes and cultural exchange initiatives can enhance representation and participation among diverse ethnic groups. While the primary focus remains on the AU as a

continental body, the chapter also considers how individual member states implement policies related to ethnic inclusivity within national and regional frameworks. This comparative approach allows for a better understanding of best practices and potential lessons that can be applied across different contexts to promote social cohesion and equitable representation within the AU.

A glimpse of cultural divergences, languages and ethnic groups that make up the African continent

Africa is a continent rich in heritage, culture and traditions, making it one of the most diverse places on earth. Home to more than 1.3 billion people, Africa comprises nearly 3 000 tribes, each with its own distinct cultural identity. These tribes are often classified based on similarities and differences in their traditions, languages and ethnic composition. The African cultural landscape is shaped by historical influences, geographical variations and sociopolitical structures that have evolved over centuries (Reid 2020). The diversity found in Africa is not just a reflection of its people but also of the environmental and historical factors that have shaped their ways of life. Despite the differences in culture, language and ethnicity, Africa's diversity is a source of strength and should not be viewed as a barrier to development. Instead, it presents an opportunity for socioeconomic growth and political advancement across the continent, particularly through the AU's initiatives aimed at fostering unity while respecting diversity.

Cultural diversities

The concept of 'culture' is central to understanding African societies. 'Culture' is broadly defined as the way of life of a people, encompassing their beliefs, values, customs, traditions, laws, religion and artistic expressions. Africa's cultural landscape is incredibly diverse, with variations existing not only between different countries but also within the same nation (Reid 2020). For example, Nigeria alone is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own language, traditions and

social norms. Similarly, Ethiopia boasts a rich ethnic composition, with groups such as the Amhara, Oromo and Tigray each contributing unique cultural elements to the nation's identity. This cultural diversity is not only reflected in everyday social interactions but also in governance, economic structures and artistic expressions. African cultures manifest in various forms, from traditional dances and music to religious beliefs and family structures. These cultural elements serve as symbols of identity and belonging for many communities across the continent. Cultural practices such as music, dance and art serve as vital expressions of African identity. Traditional African music is deeply rooted in oral traditions, with drums, string instruments and wind instruments playing a central role in various ceremonies and celebrations. According to Van Pinxteren (2019), each ethnic group has its own unique musical styles and dance forms, reflecting the values and experiences of their people. In West Africa, for example, the djembe drum is widely used in cultural performances, while in Southern Africa, the marimba and mbira are commonly played. Art, including sculpture, beadwork and textile design, is also an essential aspect of African culture. Many African artists incorporate indigenous themes and symbols in their work, preserving cultural heritage while also embracing modern influences.

Language

Language is one of the most striking markers of Africa's diversity. The continent is home to more than 2 000 languages, making it the most linguistically diverse region in the world. Linguistic diversity in Africa is shaped by historical migrations, trade interactions, colonial influences and indigenous developments. The main linguistic groups in Africa include the Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Congo (commonly referred to as Bantu), Nilo-Saharan, and Khoisan language families. These linguistic classifications are based on common grammatical structures, vocabulary and historical origins. The Niger-Congo language family, for instance, is one of the largest in the world, with languages such as Swahili, Yoruba, Igbo, Zulu and Kikuyu spoken by millions of people across different regions. Swahili, which is widely spoken in East Africa,

serves as a unifying language, bridging communication gaps between diverse ethnic groups. Similarly, Hausa is a major lingua franca in West Africa, facilitating trade and social interactions across different ethnicities (Robinson 2017).

The Bantu-speaking peoples, who belong to the Niger-Congo language family, are spread across Central, Southern and East Africa. The Kikuyu and Kamba people of Kenya, the Tswana of Botswana and South Africa, and the Kongo people of Congo share linguistic similarities despite being geographically dispersed. This linguistic connection suggests historical interactions and migrations that have influenced cultural and social exchanges. The Afro-Asiatic language family, on the other hand, is predominant in North Africa and parts of the Horn of Africa, including languages such as Arabic, Amharic, Berber and Somali. Arabic, as a dominant language in North Africa, has played a significant role in shaping cultural and religious practices in countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Algeria and Morocco. Meanwhile, the Nilo-Saharan language family, spoken by communities in the Nile Valley and parts of East and Central Africa, includes languages such as Luo, Maasai and Kanuri. The Khoisan language family, known for its unique click sounds, is primarily spoken by indigenous communities in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.

Ethnic diversity

Ethnic diversity in Africa is deeply intertwined with historical, social and economic structures. Ethnic identity plays a significant role in shaping governance, political affiliations and resource distribution within many African nations. In some cases, ethnic diversity has contributed to social cohesion, fostering cultural exchange and economic cooperation. However, ethnic divisions have also been a source of political conflict, particularly in cases where competition for power and resources has fuelled tensions. The Rwanda Genocide of 1994, for example, remains one of the most tragic instances where ethnic divisions led to large-scale violence. Similarly, ethnic tensions in countries such as Sudan, Nigeria and Ethiopia have influenced political stability and governance (Robinson

2017). Despite these challenges, many African nations are actively working towards fostering inclusivity and national unity by promoting policies that encourage cultural coexistence and equitable representation.

Religion

Religion is another crucial element of Africa's cultural diversity. The continent is home to a variety of religious beliefs, including traditional African spirituality, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Indigenous African religions, which predate the introduction of foreign faiths, are still practised in many communities and often coexist with Christianity and Islam. These traditional belief systems are characterised by ancestor worship, rituals and a strong connection to nature and spirituality. Christianity and Islam were introduced to Africa through trade, migration and colonial influences, and they have since become dominant religions in many regions. North Africa is predominantly Muslim, while Christianity has a strong presence in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. Despite religious differences, Africa has a long history of religious tolerance, with many communities practising interfaith dialogue and coexistence.

Despite its vast diversity, Africa continues to strive for unity through regional and continental initiatives such as the AU, which has played a critical role in promoting Pan-Africanism, encouraging cooperation among African nations while respecting their unique cultural identities. Organisations such as the African Cultural Fund and the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) have also contributed to the preservation and promotion of Africa's cultural heritage. Efforts to document indigenous languages, protect endangered traditions and promote cultural tourism are essential in ensuring that Africa's rich heritage is preserved for future generations.

In conclusion, Africa's cultural divergences, languages and ethnic compositions make it one of the most diverse continents in the world. This diversity, rather than being a challenge, presents an opportunity for growth, development and unity. The interconnection between culture, language ethnicity and religious affiliation highlights the importance of

inclusivity and mutual respect in fostering social cohesion. While historical and political challenges have at times created divisions, Africa's resilience lies in its ability to embrace diversity as a source of strength. Through policies that promote cultural understanding, linguistic preservation and interethnic cooperation, Africa can harness its rich heritage to drive sustainable development and political stability across the continent.

Distribution of linguistic and ethnic groups in Africa.

The main linguistic groups found in the Central African region are the Niger-Congo, *Bantu*s and the Nilo-Saharan Pygmy ethnic groups. The Niger-Congo Bantus are the Baka, Chewa, Chokwe and Kongo ethnicities (Van Pinxteren 2019). They are found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Western *Central African Republic*, Northwest *Congo*, *Botswana*, Malawi, Mozambique, *Namibia*, *Tanzania*, *Zambia and Zimbabwe*. The Nilo-Saharan Pygmy tribes found in the Central Africa region are the Aka and Efe tribes, who are found in the *Ituri Rainforest* of *Congo*.

The East Africa region is mainly populated by the Nilotic and Bantu tribes. The Nilotic groups are believed to have migrated from South Sudan and settled along the Nile River and lake and highland regions of East Africa. Some of the Nilotic groups includes the Alur, Kalenjin, Teso and Karamojong people of Uganda, Turkana and the Maasai, who occupy some parts of Tanzania and Kenya. The Bantus of East Africa are composed of the Kikuyu, Taita, Luhya, Baganda, Hutu, Tutsi and Makonde people of Tanzania.

The Afro-Asiatic Cushite people are the major ethnic group in the Horn of Africa region. They include the Afar people of Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the Agaw, Beja, Oromo, Soho, Somali and Sidama people of Egypt, Somalia and Sudan. The Afro-Asiatic, Semantic group is a minor ethnic group in the Horn of Africa region composed of the Gurage, Tigray and Tigre people found in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan.

The major ethnic groups found in North Africa are the Afro-Asiatic, Semantic and Berber groups and the Nilo-Saharan groups composed of the Dinkas Nubian people (Van Pinxteren 2019). The Egyptian Arabs are found in Egypt, while the Berbers are distributed across, Algeria, Libya

and Morocco. The Nubians and Dinkas live in Sudan and the north-eastern region of Africa.

Niger-Congo Bantus comprise the majority ethnic groups found in the southern part of Africa. They include the Awambo, Bemba, Ndebele, Shona, Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, Hererro and Venda people. The Khoisan ethnic group is composed of the KhoiKhoi and San people of South Africa. Indo-European people, also known as the Afrikaner ethnic group, are among the minority groups found in the southern part of Africa.

West Africa is a region characterised by multiple ethnic groups distributed across the region. Niger-Congo Bantus make up the highest number in the region. They include the Ashanti, Baka, Akan, Bambara and Benin people of Ghana and Nigeria, and the Fulani and Mandinka people. The Nilo-Saharan people include the Songhai and Igbo. Hausa and Creole ethnicities are also found in the West African countries of Chad, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan.

Understanding colonial legacies and influences on Africa's inter-ethnic relations in precolonial Africa

The African continent has a long history related to the existence of legal and precolonial societies as linked to the numerous cultural and linguistic structures that were distributed across the region. In an African society, family is considered the basic social unit, and the extended family played a critical role in the development and organisation of political structures. Kiwanuka (1972) argues that in precolonial Africa a group of families connected through a common and unique ancestry and language formed a tribe. In most places across the region the tribes controlled the different territories or ethnic regions. Several anthropological and ethnographic studies posit that the African continent was composed of different cultural groups which co-existed peacefully while others warred over the territories. Precolonial Africa was a continent that was comprised of many large empires located across the continent (Taylor 2018). The continent was then sub-divided into what we identify as West, East, South and Central African regions composed of diverse ethnic groups

that distinguished themselves using a complex range of cultural, religious, economic and political worldviews. Therefore, most people need to understand that there is a diverse African origin that existed before colonialism in terms of religious, cultural and political arrangements.

Historical studies indicate that Ancient Egypt was the home of African civilisation during the precolonial era. Ancient Egyptians were ruled by monarchs who unified both the upper and lower parts of Egypt (Edgerton 1947). The Egyptian way of life is considered to be complex, as it composed farmers, hunters and builders. This mix is believed to have shaped ancient Egyptian civilisation. The Egyptian empire was a leading religious, cultural and economic factor that influenced the people of Northern Africa in the period around 3000 BCE. However, after existing for a long period of time, the Egyptian dynasty fell apart after being attacked by the Macedonian empire. This led to the emergence of the Mali empire, another significant precolonial society of West Africa.

The Mali empire existed between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and profoundly impacted and influenced the culture and religion in the north-west part of Africa (Alapo 2022). This was achieved through the spread of its beliefs, customs and language along the Niger River and other regions – thus the vast spread and growth of the Mali empire in the region. Trade was the origin of power across the Mali kingdom. Characterised by a decentralised system of governance, the empire enjoyed political stability and flourished thanks to the gold trading in the region. Mansa was the head of the monarchy and the key military and judicial authority of the kingdom. Alongside the Mali empire, there existed the Ghana and Songhai kingdoms in the western part of Africa. The two empires were among the most powerful kingdoms across the globe due to the availability of natural resources like gold, which played an important role in global trade. The Songhai empire dominated the greater Mauritania and southern parts of Mali. It was characterised as a strong military system of governance. The empire was headed by a tyrant who ruled according to a brutal and dictatorial system that saw any resistance to his rules lead to severe punishment or death. Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2020) indicate that the Ghana empire, also referred to as the Waghudu, was a powerful precolonial system located between Senegal and the Niger

Delta. The empire was an epicentre of trade between the Berbers (people of Northern Africa) and the Arabs. It grew and developed rapidly due to the gold and salt trade in the region.

In the southern parts of Africa, including what is now known as Zambia and Zimbabwe, precolonial societies and legacies existed among the people. The great Zimbabwe empire, also known as the Mutapa empire, was located in the areas of the Limpopo and Zambezi Rivers across the Shona region. During the precolonial era, the Mutapa empire was an elaborate civilisation which focused on exploiting the mineral wealth of the regions. The Zulu kingdom is another powerful empire of Southern Africa. It is characterised by a decentralised system of governance. The Zulu people are traditionally organised into small clans headed by chiefs who are guided by a senior chief. The chiefs are male and are tasked with solving disputes among the clan members. The Zulu kingdom is among the empires that still exist in modern Africa.

The precolonial communities in Africa interacted mostly through trade, migration, language, marriage, warfare and diplomacy. Before the arrival of Europeans, there existed around 10 000 states or societies which varied greatly in size, structure and civilisation (Young 2023). Precolonial societies and legacies on the African continent can be categorised as either centralised or decentralised systems, where the centralised societies were led by rulers or monarchs who oversaw the making and executing of laws, collection of taxes, and the development of communities through trade and agriculture. A deep analysis of societies indicates that the power possessed by the rulers varied between empires, with some emperors possessing more power while others acted a symbolic status. In the decentralised societies, like the Igbo of Nigeria, power was distributed across the community through the group system of governance. Local community elders governed with the help of the overall population. This was the case among the Agikuyu people of Kenya, Pygmy people of the Central African Republic and the Khoisan people of Southern Africa.

Therefore, it is evident that the African continent existed and was controlled by the indigenous inhabitants before the colonial era (Binns, Dixon and Nel 2012). As a continental people, Africans had a unique way of life and governance which was influenced by cultural practices such as

language, beliefs and economic activities. It is important to understand that most European settlers and explorers claimed that precolonial Africa was unsettled and lacked civilisation upon their arrival, which is a misguided argument.

Colonialism and the scramble for Africa

European colonisation of Africa began during the nineteenth century and ended in the mid-twentieth century. The nineteenth century in Europe was a period of rapid industrial development. This means that Europeans sought a source of raw materials, labour and markets for its finished products (Gilley 2018). Politics in Europe also led to the colonisation of Africa. During that era, nationalism was a key factor in Europe. This led to competition and war related to colonial expansion of European states in Africa. The scramble for Africa began in earnest at the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, during which the European nations focused on accessing the key trade routes in Africa, especially along the Congo and Niger Basins. This was aimed at reducing the internal African trade that was prevalent in those areas. The Berlin Conference placed a ban on importing and selling firearms in Africa, as a way of ensuring the Europeans attained monopoly over the locals. After agreement was reached, the annexation and occupation of the African continent was achieved by the early 1900s, by which time about 90% of the African continent was under colonial rule. The European nations partitioned Africa into spheres in accordance to colonies, influence and other segments. It is important to note that the colonisers partitioned the African continent with limited information on the histories, ethnicities and geographical structure of its people.

Colonialists employed deceitful and underhanded powers in their territorial acquisition of Africa. They dealt preferentially with the local African leaders, using divide-and-rule tactics, direct rule and intimidation as ways to attain what they needed. The scramble for and partition of Africa during the Berlin Conference led to the adoption of the Berlin Act, which saw the colonialists design and develop regional maps as a way of eliminating competition among them. Due to a lack of critical knowledge about the African continent, the regional maps and partition focused solely on land

and resource allocation, without considering the spread of the continent's ethnic groups. The colonial borders ended up dividing people from the same ethnic groups across Africa. For example, in the Horn of Africa, the Somali people were split into British Somalia, French Somalia, Ethiopian Somalis and the Somali people of the northern part of Kenya.

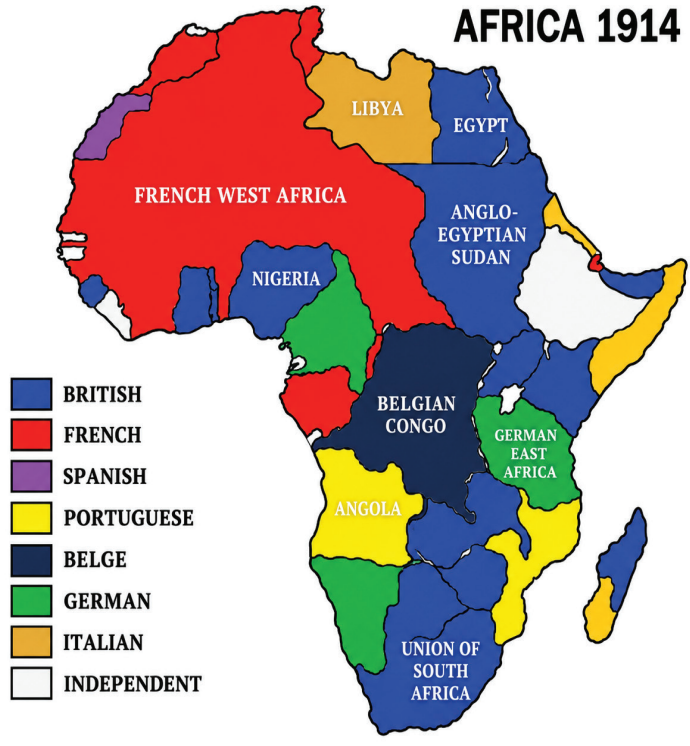


Figure 3.1: A political map of Africa in 1914.

Political legacies

Colonialism deeply impacted and influenced the political system of the people of Africa. The current political structures and borders are a direct reflection of European colonialism in Africa. The colonialism structure directly influenced African policies by getting rid of the

indigenous political institutions. A centralised and decentralised system of governance was practised across the continent. However, the introduction of colonialism hugely influenced political structures and societies by introducing slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism. This means that the modern African countries have a political system which is a remnant of the colonial systems.

Contemporary African states continue to suffer from the effects of colonialism. The political legacies of colonialism across Africa are associated with increased corruption and authoritarian and bureaucratic leadership systems. Exploiting resources across the continent was the key aim of colonialism. This means that the Europeans employed an undemocratic leadership system which imposed pungent measures as a way of attaining their targets. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the European economy was vast due to the rapid Industrial Revolution. This led to the introduction of imperialism between Africa and Europe. Parashar and Schulz (2021) state that imperialism was considered a postcolonial legacy of colonialism in Africa by the mid-twentieth century. After the struggle for independence by most African countries, the colonialists were forced to consider decolonisation. However, decolonisation led to the introduction of neocolonialism as a continuum of European colonisation.

Neocolonialism refers to the long-lasting impact or influence of colonialism in Africa. It operates in subtle ways, and most prominent African leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, considered neocolonialism 'the worst form of imperialism' (Langan 2017). Neocolonialism has exposed most African states to exploitation, forcing people to continue suffering (John, Messina and Chukwuemeka 2023). The West continues to manipulate African countries through international control of the global markets, high-interest loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, foreign aid with attachments and humiliating conditions, use of the labour unions and movements to sow destabilisation, manipulation of the media, and domination of African economies through multinational corporations (Mkandawire and Soludo 2003). This has led to unequal development and underdevelopment of most

African countries (Tabi 2016). Moreover, neocolonialism shows its presence in some African countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, through the Western nations creating a state of inevitability and instability, thus leading to underdevelopment and exploitation of resources (Udegbunam 2020).

Colonial influence on Africa's inter-ethnic relationships

Ethnic divisions in Africa have been significantly shaped by the colonial system, which imposed artificial boundaries, disrupted traditional governance structures and fostered ethnic rivalries. The ethnic fragmentation witnessed across the continent today is largely a product of colonial-era policies that prioritised European interests over indigenous cohesion. Colonial rulers employed a divide-and-rule strategy, deliberately pitting ethnic groups against each other to maintain control. This approach created a lasting legacy of mistrust, conflict and political marginalisation, which persists in many African nations. The marginalisation and exclusion seen in postcolonial African political systems stem directly from the administrative structures established by European colonisers. These systems not only suppressed indigenous governance but also deepened ethnic divisions by favouring certain groups over others.

One of the most detrimental impacts of colonial rule was the erosion of Africa's social identity and traditional structures. Colonial powers implemented various governance models, such as direct rule, indirect rule, and assimilation, each of which altered the preexisting social fabric in different ways. Traditional leadership structures were often dismantled, and in their place colonial authorities appointed leaders who were loyal to European interests. This frequently resulted in ethnic conflicts, as those who collaborated with colonial rulers gained economic and political advantages, while those who resisted faced marginalisation. The long-term effect of this policy is evident in the contemporary African political landscape, which sees ethnic affiliations continue to dictate political alignments. Instead of fostering national unity, many post-independence African leaders have exploited ethnic divisions to advance their political ambitions. Politicians often mobilise support along ethnic lines, leading to

electoral violence, political instability and sustained inter-ethnic tensions (Fearon 2003).

A notable example of ethnic divisions rooted in colonial legacies is the case of Somalia and Sudan. In Somalia, colonial powers divided the Somali people among different territories, with portions of the population ending up in present-day Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. This fragmentation has contributed to ongoing political instability and conflicts over territorial identity. Similarly, in Sudan, the British colonial administration reinforced ethnic and religious divisions by governing the northern and southern regions separately, fostering resentment and eventual civil war. Another example is the case of the Lou-Nuer people of South Sudan and the Jikany-Nuer people of Ethiopia. Although they share a common ethnic background, colonial-imposed borders have separated them into different nationalities, fuelling tensions and hostility between them. These examples demonstrate how colonial boundaries and policies continue to influence inter-ethnic relations in modern Africa, often leading to disputes over identity, land and political power.

The colonial education system also played a significant role in rein forcing ethnic and cultural divisions in Africa. Schools established by colonial administrations served as tools of oppression, deliberately alienating African children from their native cultures, languages and traditions. Students in colonial schools were often forbidden from speaking their mother tongues and were instead required to adopt European languages. This practice contributed to the erosion of indigenous languages and cultural heritage. In many African countries today, the colonial languages introduced during this period remain dominant, often at the expense of indigenous languages. For instance, English is the official language in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe, while French is widely spoken in countries such as Benin, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Rwanda and Senegal. Similarly, Portuguese remains the official language in Mozambique and Angola. While these languages have facilitated communication and governance in multi-ethnic nations, they have also contributed to the marginalisation of indigenous languages and cultural identities.

Beyond language, colonial policies also instilled a sense of inferiority

among African communities regarding their cultural heritage. Many indigenous customs, belief systems and governance practices were labelled 'backward' or 'uncivilised' by colonial authorities. This perception persists in some African societies today, with Western cultural norms often regarded as superior. The emphasis on Western education, attire and governance models has, in some cases, further distanced African people from their traditional ways of life. The erosion of indigenous knowledge systems has also contributed to a loss of cultural continuity and intergenerational identity.

Despite gaining independence, many African governments have struggled to dismantle the deeply entrenched colonial legacies that continue to shape ethnic relations. Fearon (2003) argues that, rather than addressing the root causes of inter-ethnic divisions, some African leaders have perpetuated colonial-era practices by favouring their ethnic groups in political appointments, resource allocation and economic opportunities. This has fuelled resentment among marginalised communities, leading to political instability and, in some cases, violent conflicts. The persistence of ethnic-based politics in Africa indicates that colonialism's impact on inter-ethnic relations was not merely a historical event but an ongoing challenge that requires deliberate efforts to overcome.

Efforts to address ethnic divisions in Africa must include policies that promote national unity while respecting cultural diversity. Governments should invest in inclusive governance structures that provide equal opportunities for all ethnic groups, regardless of their historical affiliations. Additionally, there should be initiatives to preserve and promote indigenous languages and cultural traditions to counteract the effects of colonial assimilation policies. The AU, regional organisations and national governments must collaborate to foster dialogue, reconciliation and policies that address historical grievances while building cohesive societies.

Therefore, colonial influence has had a lasting impact on Africa's inter-ethnic relationships, shaping the continent's political, social and cultural dynamics. The divide-and-rule strategy employed by colonial powers entrenched ethnic divisions, leading to conflicts that persist to this day. Colonial education systems further reinforced these divisions by

alienating African people from their indigenous languages and cultures. Post-independence African leaders have, in some cases, exacerbated these divisions for political gain, rather than working towards genuine unity. However, by acknowledging these colonial legacies and implementing inclusive policies, African nations can work towards a more cohesive and harmonious future. Addressing the historical injustices of colonialism requires a commitment to promoting cultural preservation, equitable governance and national unity across ethnic lines.

State of play in the African Union Commission

The African Union is a continental body composed of 55 Member States that make up the countries of the African continent. The primary role of the bloc is to promote unity and solidarity among the African states, and social-economic development of the member countries. The AU is tasked with the responsibility of attaining development through integration of the Member States with the international community. It focuses on enhancing socio-economic development of the continent through collaborative efforts geared towards alleviating poverty, tackling corruption and strengthening good political governance. This can be attained through enhancing the political process and civil governance – by promoting the democratic system as a way of enhancing transparency and accountability throughout the continent. However, the AU is faced with several challenges that undermine its ability to promote socio-economic development on the continent. Ethnic diversity is among the myriad challenges that still hinder the organisation's ability to attain its goals and objectives across the continent (Syed 2020). It is quite unfortunate that most African countries are faced with ethnicity issues such as ethnicity-based conflicts. Countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Somalia are still crippled by complex ethnicity-based conflicts, which rank among the complexities in balancing ethnic diversity in the AU. Ethnic diversity is an issue that combines with other factors, such as poverty, corruption, poor administration and governance, which weaken institutions such as the AU. It is vital to understand that ethnicity is a deep-rooted personal matter for Africans. Yet, it is a key issue

that must be addressed to solve several challenges facing the continent.

Ethnicity is an issue that is linked to instability and economic division in the AU. It is an issue that has hugely shaped the political status and conflicts in many African societies. The complexities inherent in balancing ethnic diversities in the continent have been known to overshadow the role of ethnicity in developing nationalism in Africa. Since the late twentieth century, conflicts and instabilities in Africa have been linked with the ethnic divisions that exist among the political systems among the AU Member States (Comaroff and Stern 1995). In most African countries, the political elite are known to gather either positive or negative ethnicity as a way of staying in power and maintaining their political status. Therefore, successful integration of the different ethnic groups is a key challenge for most of the AU Member States. Currently, the AU struggles with integrating the different ethnic groups found in a country into one common unit – a process also known as developing a national identity. The prevalent ethnic conflicts, such as those in the DRC and Somalia, have become a salient destabilising force, creating several complexities in balancing ethnic diversities in the AU (Posner 2005). Moreover, ethnic conflicts can lead to internal conflicts within a country, or to cross-border conflicts like that between Ethiopia and South Sudan.

Geography is a key aspect associated with creating complexities in balancing ethnic diversities in Africa. Foucher (2019) argues that the current African map and its geography are strongly associated with the continent's colonial past. Geographical structure is a factor linked with the current political power within the continent. In Africa, geography is the foundation of power or the different Member States of the AU. During the scramble for Africa, the colonisers divided the continent into West, North, East, Central and South. This division is associated with the exacerbation of ethnic differences among Africa's people (Gilley 2018). The colonisers carelessly divided the land without considering the traditional form of administration and boundaries, thus resulting in immediate conflicts and instability among the different ethnic groups. This destabilised the traditional African socio-economic order, dividing the pre-existing ethnic communities into different countries and regions. For instance, the Abasamia people are found in Kenya and Uganda,

despite speaking the same dialect and language and sharing customs (Saideman 2001). The new borders created an unnatural situation which has remained static over the years. This effect is still a challenge for most African countries as, despite gaining independence, they still fail to understand the real meaning of cohesion and integration, thus resulting in dictatorship and lack of democracy. This has led to a lack of ethnic integrity and social cohesion among the African Union Member States (Funjika and Getachew 2022). For instance, the 1994 Rwanda Genocide is an example of the complexities in balancing ethnic diversity among AU countries. Despite the Rwandan population being composed of two major ethnic groups, namely the Hutus (Bantus) and the Tutsis (Hamitic), the difficulties in balancing ethnic diversities led to dreadful conflicts, which saw the Hutus massacring many Tutsis, leading to their exile into Uganda, Burundi and Kenya during independence. However, the exiled children grew and turned against the Hutus in a four-year civil war that led to the famous Rwanda Genocide of 1994. It is important to understand that genocide does not occur between communities that see each other as 'legitimate' despite their differences. However, it occurs among people of different ethnicities that are purportedly 'illegitimate' – and any slight attempt to ascend to power is considered a disruption. This is a clear example that post-independence African citizenship in the AU is still crippled with challenges of who belongs and who does not. Despite efforts by the AU to turn Africa into one united continent, the treatment of African citizens in most African countries still raises the silent question of who belongs and who does not, which can be considered a silent form of apartheid. Ethnic differences created by a changed geography decided by outsiders is the new form of twenty-first-century apartheid within the continent – thus a major complexity in balancing ethnic diversity in the AU.

Corruption within the AU is another complexity inherent in balancing ethnic diversity among the AU Member States. Postcolonial Africa is associated with massive corruption and poverty. Corruption still poses serious challenges in the socio-economic development of Africa. It undermines the existence of institutions such as the AU, which values democracy, justice and societal ethical values. Therefore,

corruption within the African continent has jeopardised sustainable social and economic development of the region. Corruption and unequal distribution of resources are associated with the major sources of conflict and coup d'etats in the African continent. According to an AU report, most African leaders, political elites and civil servants steal more than US$200 billion dollars per annum, which has led to increased ethnic conflicts, instability and increased rebel activities, especially among the West African countries like Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leonne.

Bad governance and exclusionary political practices are issues that create complexities within the AU when it comes to balancing ethnic diversity. Due to the lack of a national identity framework within the AU, most politicians exploit the concept of ethnicity as a way of mobilising voters. In many African countries, flawed elections have precipitated political disputes and increased tensions that turn into conflicts. In the past few years, violent post-election conflicts have emerged associated with the struggle within different ethnicities to ascend to power, such as those in Ethiopia and Kenya in 2007. This has created challenges in balancing ethnic diversity within the continent, as most political elites adopt ethnic differences during their mobilisation, thus stifling any opportunity for good or effective governance and development of democratic institutions. In most AU Member States, some candidates or communities are barred from participating in elections due to their ethnicity. For instance, an ex-Prime Minister of Cote d'Ivoire, Alassane Ouattara, was barred from participating and contesting in elections since his parents had migrated from neighbouring Burkina Faso. This created some challenges in balancing the aspect of ethnic diversity within the African continent. As a result, the concept of bad governance affects the political practice of the AU, creating significant challenges when it comes to balancing ethnic diversity within the continent.

The quest for fair representation within the AU framework

The question of fairness for underrepresented groups within the AU framework is something that has been lingering on and is as old as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The establishment of the OAU

in 1963 was aimed at establishing an organisation that would create some loose framework to improve the relationship between the different African states and promote independence of African nations from the colonisers. The foundational principles of the organisation included chartering social, economic and ethnic cooperation among the Member States. The OAU Charter enacted several principles, such as promoting sovereignty, territorial integrity and equality among the Member States. The initial frameworks were deemed important during the struggle for independence. However, they lost vigour after countries like South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe liberated themselves from colonial rule. This was replaced by a massive violation of human rights across the continent, such that the organisation was criticised for practising authoritarian leadership. This led to the establishment of the AU in 2001 as a way of addressing the major challenges facing the African continent that its predecessor failed to address.

However, the AU framework is still facing several complexities when it comes to balancing ethnic diversity within the continent. This leads to the question of fairness for the underrepresented minority groups within the organisational framework (Vermeulen and Coetzee 2006). Many Member States fail to consider the question of minority and under-representation as an African problem. At the same time, most ethnic groups categorised as minority groups living in the continent suffer from lack of representation. This means that their rights and concerns often tend to be ignored. According to the organisation's framework, the Member States have disavowed the issue of ethnic diversity as a factor that is divisive and have assumed a mythical nationalism among states, despite most of them being multi-ethnic states (Comaroff and Stern 1995). Therefore, to address the question of under-representation, it is vital for the AU to accommodate ethnic diversity among its policies and framework in order to combat the issues of socio-economic and political exclusion within the continent.

Pragmatic approaches for fostering inclusivity and voice amplification

Since inception, the AU's vision has been based on the spirit of Pan-

Africanism, which focuses on creating socio-political and economic liberation of all Africans (Gwagwa, Kazi and Hilliard 2022). The organisation is focused on fostering an all-inclusive development and voice amplification of all people from the different ethnic groups which are underrepresented in the overall AU framework. This can be achieved by creating a united Africa or a federal government structure focused on accelerating continental unity of all Member States. Adoption of Pan-Africanism into the AU framework will encourage and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood between people of different ethnicities across the continent. The push for African nationalism means that the organisation will focus on accelerating socio-economic and political development as a key aspect of fostering continental unity and integration of democratic institutions across Africa (Okedele 2021). Moreover, this means that the organisation will work towards eliminating all forms of colonisation that remain in Africa and ensuring the full liberation of the African people.

The adoption of a common language across the continent is the key to fostering inclusivity and voice amplification of the underrepresented groups in the AU (Nwachi 2021). According to Chakanyuka (2020), language is a powerful driver of inclusion that allows people to communicate and engage with each other (Chakanyuka 2020). It plays a key role in AU stakeholder engagement and promotion of the overall organisational culture of the Member States (Gwagwa, Kazim and Hilliard 2022). Adopting a common language will enhance inclusivity, as it acknowledges diversity and promotes acceptance of the values of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. A common language helps develop a sense of inclusion, as it involves empowering the audience or citizens of the Member States. It helps in eliminating conscious and unconscious bias, thus it can be used to shift negative attitudes and beliefs within the organisation. This fosters inclusivity and voice amplification within the continent.

The organisation should focus on bolstering good governance as a way of addressing inequality, peaceful ethnic co-existence and socio-economic development of the continent. This can be achieved through enhanced regional cooperation that ensures effective participation of all Member States in both economic and political systems within the organisations,

as this would include all the underrepresented ethnic groups within the continent. Therefore, the AU framework should focus on encouraging each Member State to address the key governing challenges that they are encountering and engage in robust national dialogue and institutional reforms to form an effective and inclusive government that promotes the aspect of nationalism. Inclusion needs good leadership, which means it must include democracy and respect for human rights (Consuegra 2020). The AU framework must be developed to ensure that the organisation has a universal culture that promotes democratic values, equality and respect for the rule of law and human rights. Democratic values involve adoption of capable governing institutions that foster equitable development for all people. This means that the organisation must develop rules that enhance inclusivity and voice amplification for all people, including the underrepresented ethnic groups. Therefore, this will involve enhancing the AU's 2001 constitution, including a detailed implementation plan related to tackling questionable leadership with the organisation and its Member States. According to Mengisteab (2010), AU leaders must enhance good governance and democracy as the foundation of boosting inclusivity and fostering voice amplification within the continent as it relates to enhanced socio-economic and political development in the African continent.

Enhanced sustainable development is the key to fostering inclusivity and voice amplification within the AU (Rwigema 2024). The organisation should develop a framework pertaining to the aspiration and adoption of sustainable development across the continent (Giovannetti 2010). This should emphasise regional developments as a way of attaining continental socio-economic and monetary integration. According to Munyaradzi (2014), sustainable development must emphasise enhancing the living standards of the African people as a way of enhancing the economic stability of people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Munyaradzi 2014). This will foster inclusivity, as it promotes peaceful co-existence and reduced conflict among the different Member States, thus contributing to economic development and integration of the continent (Waal 2002).

Conclusion and recommendations

Africa is a continent that is made up of people with different ethnicities. For a long time, ethnic diversity within the continent has been a liability, due to the increased ethnic conflict being witnessed in Africa. The West exploits ethnicity to shape African agency and how it is located in the Global South. As a continent, Africa has experienced devastating effects related to diversity, fuelled by colonialism and rapid globalisation. This has led to people of different ethnicities perceiving others as being 'lesser', especially when it comes to socio-economic and political matters – which has led to increased division and the emergence of modern conflicts in countries like the DRC. Historical analysis of Africa indicates that ethnic conflicts are quite a challenge, especially when it comes to resolving them.

For a long time, politicians in Africa have exacerbated ethnic conflicts through unfair distribution of resources, as a way of gaining their selfish political advantage. Ethnicity in Africa is used as a prominent tool by those in power, and it is the fuelling force in politics. This has led to increased ethnic competitiveness, thus creating a lot of political uncertainty and political instability within the continent. Therefore, it is important to adopt ethnic diversity as an invaluable asset, and not a liability associated with insecurity and conflict in Africa.

Removing ethnicity from African politics is the key step towards tackling issues related to ethnicity across the continent. This can be achieved by treating ethnic diversity as an asset that fosters growth and development in both the public and private sector. Research studies indicate that adopting ethnic diversity is vital for institutions and governments, thus positive outcomes related to socio-economic development of the AU Member States could be expected. Regional organisations must focus on embracing management strategies such as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programmes, as they help in enhancing social inclusion, co-existence and peace. Therefore, by fostering an inclusive structure where ethnic diversity is embraced, Africa is more likely to enjoy political stability and reductions in conflicts, insecurity and

violence. This will lead to economic growth and development through enhanced trade, investment and performance of both government and non-governmental organisations.

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CHAPTER 4

Strategically Leveraging the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and G77 to Build an Afro-Sino Coalition to Advance the Development of a Multipolar World Order

Mandira Bagwandeen
Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Introduction

As countries around the world, especially in the Global South, attempt to navigate an international system in flux and shifting towards a multipolar world order, they face not only multiple climatic, environmental, security, socio-economic and health challenges, but also have to respond to growing geopolitical tensions between the US-led West and revisionist powers such as China (and Russia). The neoliberal international politico-economic order that the US and its Western allies built after the Cold War, largely for their own benefit, is fracturing as emerging and revisionist powers push for a multipolar world and for reforming global governance structures that are failing to respond equitably to the various polycrises affecting the world. Amid Africa's urgent need for fair and effective representation in global institutions that better reflect African interests and needs, without being pressured to choose sides in geopolitical struggles, many African countries are sticking to the Cold War-era strategy of remaining non-aligned. In this context, African countries are turning to the NAM and G77 – both of which served as crucial platforms to articulate Global South development interests and positions on geopolitical issues during the Cold War – to once again serve as bastions of non-alignment, specifically active non-alignment (also known as active neutrality).[1] Given China's ties to the NAM and G77, and its shared vision, shared with many African states, of a more inclusive and multipolar world, both these institutions

can serve as strategic platforms for Chinese and African efforts to build an Afro-Sino coalition to advance a multipolar world order that better serves and works in the interests of both regions and the wider Global South. However, how this coalition develops will reveal whether the principles of active non-alignment – especially Africa's autonomy and capacity to act independently – are truly upheld, or if African countries will once again be beholden to a dominant external partner. This time, that partner would be from the Global South, not the Global North.

Born from the Bandung Conference (also known as the Asian-African Conference) held in Indonesia in 1955, the NAM was officially established at the Belgrade Conference in Yugoslavia (now Serbia) in 1961. Since then, this intergovernmental organisation has mirrored the changing political and economic dynamics of the Global South (Xiong 2012). Initially the NAM was characterised as a loosely organised group of countries (sharing experiences of colonialism and Western subjugation) that aimed to assert defensive non-alignment as a tactical strategy to navigate the Cold War. Over time, it has evolved into a more proactive and 'offensive alliance network' practising assertive non-alignment (Xiong 2012). Beyond representing much of the developing world's stance on geopolitical issues, the NAM has increasingly focused on promoting economic cooperation among its members, seeking to promote trade, investment and development, and to address a wide range of global challenges, including (but not limited to) climate and environmental issues, terrorism, and social and humanitarian needs (Non-Aligned Movement n.d.). Of its 120 members, all 54 African states are members of the NAM, and several African countries have hosted NAM Summits, including Egypt (1964), Zambia (1970), Algeria (1973), Angola (1992), South Africa (1998), Zimbabwe (2003) and Uganda (2024). Uganda is currently the Chair of the NAM (from 2024 to 2027). This is an important role, as the chairing country helps set the agenda and guide the movement.

Supporting and complementing the NAM's efforts to promote economic and development cooperation among its members is the G77, an intergovernmental organisation of developing countries established in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1964, during the first session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Considered the

economic arm of the NAM, the group has aimed to challenge Western-designed institutions such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its successor, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and to promote a more equitable international order. At the G77's first ministerial summit, hosted by Algeria in October 1967, the group adopted the Algiers Charter, advocating for sweeping reforms to address the challenges faced by developing countries in a global economic system leaning heavily in the West's favour (Adebajo 2024).

Although the G77 retains its name for historical significance, as of 2024 its membership totalled 133 states, with all 54 African countries as members (The Group of 77 at the United Nations n.d.). Several African countries, including Egypt (1971–1973; 1984–1985; 2018), Tunisia (1978–1979), Algeria (1981–1982), Tanzania (1997), Nigeria (2000) and South Africa (2006; 2015), have held the chairmanship of the G77. Alongside its chairmanship of the NAM, Uganda is chairing the G77 from 2024 to 2027; in January 2024, it hosted the Third South Summit, becoming the first African country to do so. These summits are the highest-level meetings of the G77. The first and second South Summits were held by Cuba (2000) and Qatar (2005). These summits bring together Heads of State and Governments to discuss key issues and set the group's strategic direction. Hosting a South Summit demonstrates a strong commitment to the G77's goals and provides the host country with an opportunity to showcase its leadership. Additionally, African countries are members of the G77 Bureau, which is the group's executive arm that supports the Chair in carrying out its functions, shaping the G77's agenda and priorities and facilitating communication among members. To promote geographical balance and represent the diverse interests of group members, the Bureau includes representatives from different regional groups within the G77.

The G77 continues to address the disadvantages and marginalisation developing countries face in the international economic system by advocating for and negotiating more equitable and favourable terms for these countries in global trade and finance. Although the G77 is not a United Nations (UN) organ or agency – rather, it is the 'largest intergovernmental organisation of developing countries at the UN'

(The Group of 77 at the United Nations n.d.) – it is deeply intertwined within the UN system and UNCTAD framework. It prioritises activities within the UN, especially those related to economic development, trade and international cooperation, and promotes South-South development cooperation. Essentially, the G77 functions as a platform for developing countries to coordinate their positions and negotiate collectively within the UN system (UN Chronicle 2014). Over the past decade, recent G77 Chairs – many of which were held by African countries – have criticised the Global North and the current international order more assertively. For example, Egypt accused American–Euro powers of having a 'monopoly' and of 'disregard' for Global South 'peoples and communities', and Guinea criticised the Global North for maintaining a 'system of exploitation' (Baumann and Novoselova 2024). Escalating its longstanding criticism, Cuba branded the current system as 'unjust, irrational, and abusive' and as 'replicating a pattern of modern colonialism' (Baumann and Novoselova 2024). Although the group may not broadly share such strong, assertive language, it speaks to increased tensions around UN reform, where Global North countries seek to maintain the upper hand (Baumann and Novoselova 2024).

In an effort to challenge the Western-dominated international system, the NAM and especially the G77 have nurtured a 'unique and enduring alliance' with China (Baumann and Novoselova 2024). This relationship, driven by vigorous North–South debates in the UN General Assembly, deepened after the G77 played a key role in de-seating Taiwan from the UN in 1971, allowing the People's Republic of China (PRC) to take over its seat (Baumann and Novoselova 2024). Considering itself the largest developing country in the world – although this is debatable depending on the indices used to measure development – China's interests closely align with those of other developing countries. As President Xi Jinping stated, 'As a developing country and a member of the Global South, China breathes the same breath with other developing countries and pursues a shared future with them' (Shin 2024). Like much of the Global South, China's history of Western subjugation, opposition to imperialism and hegemony, preference for multipolarity, and goals of economic development and prosperity have fostered close cooperation with the NAM and G77.

As China's political, economic and security power has grown over the years, its self-identification as the 'largest developing country' has steadily evolved, necessitating a more assertive yet pragmatic diplomatic strategy to reflect its emerging big-power status in global affairs (Hu 2016). To achieve this, China has largely positioned itself as championing developing economies in multilateral organisations and leading the Global South; effectively progressing from what Wang et al. (2022) describe as a participant-practitioner-leader matriculation in multilateral forums. Although China is neither an official member of the NAM nor a 'full member' of the G77, it closely monitors the developments of both organisations. However, the G77 is often referred to in events and official statements as 'The Group of 77 and China' or 'G77+ China', and the country is officially listed on the group's website as a member, even though it does not identify as such. This reflects the unique and close partnership between China and the G77, and the arrangement allows China to cooperate loosely with the group, giving it flexibility in its foreign policy and autonomy to pursue its own interests. China's close cooperation with the G77 enables it to increase its global influence (especially amplifying its voice on Global South issues and expanding its influence within the UN system), promoting its economic development model and agenda, as well as gaining diplomatic support. Indicative of its loose partnership with the G77, China often refers to itself as a 'friend' of the organisation, sometimes providing aid and financial assistance (The People's Republic of China [The PRC], Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA] 2006; 2013). For example, to support Uganda in hosting the NAM and G77 summits in January 2024, China provided 70 SUVs to help transport delegates (Xinhua 2023).

China is so closely connected with the NAM and G77 that, during their respective summits, special representatives of the Chinese government are present and actively participate; their speeches often reaffirm China's support for the developing world and its alignment with the Global South. China is the only permanent member of the UN Security Council that is regularly invited to the groups' meetings. At the 19th NAM Summit and the G77's Third South Summit, both held in January 2024 in Kampala, Uganda, Liu Guozhong, China's Vice Premier, attended as China's special

representative. Moreover, the Kampala Declaration explicitly recognised China as a partner of the NAM and G77, stating that in ongoing efforts to promote 'engagements and partnerships between G77 and China and NAM … the ultimate purpose of enhancing coordination among both groupings and capitalizing on their synergies and commonalities of views … is to address matters of common interest to the Global South' (Non-Aligned Movement [NAM] 2024: 3).

China seems to strategically leverage these platforms to not only assert itself as the leader of the Global South but also use the Global South countries strategically by understanding and influencing their perspectives on geopolitical inflection points (such as the Russia–Ukraine war, the Israel–Palestine war, and the reformation of multilateral institutions), effectively positioning itself as the leader of a new emerging multipolar world order (Nyabiage 2024). China is well aware that the NAM and G77 represent more than half of the world's population and that, through strategic engagement with this 'critical mass', it could play a significant role in reforming the America–Euro-led international order (Nyabiage 2024). However, the NAM and G77 have produced mixed results and have mostly been unable to reshape the US-dominated post-Second World War economic order (Adebajo 2024). This is largely reflected in the UN Pact for the Future (2024), which aims to address global challenges and strengthen multilateralism but faced significant criticism for failing to adequately address the interests of the Global South. It fell short in several key areas – including provisions on concrete mechanisms for debt relief or restructuring, access to finance (especially for developing countries) to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals – and it only marginally focuses on reform of the UN Security Council and Bretton Woods Institutions (Botticelli 2024; Motamedi 2024).

Beijing is acutely aware of Africa's 'massive voting clout' in international organisations. In 1971, of the 76 countries that voted at the UN General Assembly for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to replace the Republic of China (ROC) (Taiwan) as the sole legitimate representative of China at the UN, 26 African countries voted in favour of the PRC, accounting for just over a third of the votes. Besides showing support for African countries in other multilateral organisations such as the UN and

WTO, Beijing needs to cooperate, especially with the African members in the NAM and G77, to strategically influence these organisations' support for China's rise as a major power amidst changing geopolitical dynamics and an evolving international system. Since African countries form the largest regional bloc of non-aligned countries, it would be remiss of Chinese geopolitical strategists not to factor in the influence and weight of the NAM and G77's Africa group.

African countries can also leverage the NAM and G77 to shape and influence relations with China for their benefit. Through collective action within the NAM and G77, African countries can negotiate more favourable terms in their economic engagements with China, including trade agreements, investment deals and loan conditions. Aligning their interests and expectations pushes China to consider the concerns of a large bloc rather than individual nations. Africa as a whole can also advocate for common standards and principles to guide and improve China's relations with the region. This could involve environmental protection measures, labour rights and increased transparency in loan agreements. Such efforts would encourage China to adopt more responsible and sustainable practices in its investments and projects, helping to reduce potential negative impacts and ensuring that Chinese engagement supports Africa's long-term development (in line with the African Union's [AU's] Agenda 2063). In the spirit of South–South cooperation, African countries should strive for a more balanced relationship with China by advocating for genuine and more technology and knowledge transfer from China to advance their economies and address global challenges. Through the G77, the Africa group can facilitate dialogue with China on debt restructuring, relief, more sustainable lending practices and reforming the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. This could likely improve African countries' chances of obtaining better loan terms and reducing the risk of debt crises. Achieving tangible results will depend on the effectiveness of strategies used to engage with China within the NAM and G77 frameworks, and the ability of African countries to maintain unity and coordinate their actions within these organisations.

In the context of Africans advocating for a multipolar world order (echoing China) and simultaneously seeking to make significant

development strides while addressing multiple global challenges, African countries must be proactive in setting agendas and clearly voicing their concerns within the NAM and G77. To do this, open communication channels and diplomatic engagement should be maintained with all African members and the ex officio member, China. Overall, this will require robust African agency within the NAM and G77, especially when engaging with China to ensure that Africa en bloc is not simply being used to advance Chinese geopolitical and geostrategic interests.

The Ten Bandung Principles and Sino-Africa relations

Chinese efforts to develop relations with African states date back to the Bandung Conference, attended by newly independent African and Asian states seeking to foster closer political, economic and cultural cooperation and collectively oppose colonialism. Many participating countries at the Bandung Conference were 'young nations with little to no military power, and thus no ability to form a bloc. However, by positioning themselves as a group and resisting the existing East–West blocs sustaining the Cold War era, Bandung [-affiliated countries] initiated a movement that mirrored the concept of multipolarity' (Mbaidjol 2018: 25). Until this conference, China had had minimal contact with Africa; Beijing had a relatively clean slate that it could use to build ties with African countries. Before the Bandung Conference of 1955, Zhou Enlai (then China's Foreign Minister) introduced the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in 1954. These included mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in internal affairs; equality and mutually beneficial cooperation; and peaceful coexistence. Emerging after its Century of Humiliation – a period in China's history of intervention and subjugation by Western powers and Japan – the country 'needed to base its foreign policy around a set of principles that would embody its principled independence in world affairs. The Five Principles were borne of postcolonial solidarity, and Chinese leaders embraced them for both their moral weight and strategic flexibility' (Panda 2014). As China began evolving into a major power at the turn of the century, it continued referencing the Five Principles to justify its voting record at the

UN Security Council or to support its condemnation of interventionist Western powers.

All five of these principles were included in the Ten Bandung Principles – a framework for cooperation and solidarity that the NAM later adopted to guide its efforts in fostering cooperation among members not aligned with the US or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) during the Cold War. China used its experience of Western subjugation as a common denominator and prescribed to Zhou En Lai's Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and, by extension, the Ten Bandung Principles, to build relations with African countries in several ways:

Support for independence movements

The founding of the PRC (in 1949) coincided with Africa's emergent independence movements from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s; this was a pivotal period for China–Africa relations (Alden and Alves 2008: 47). It presented China with an opportunity to align itself with Africa's pervasive anti-colonial and anti-imperialist sentiment of the time and challenge Western influence on the continent. As the Sino–Soviet split escalated in the 1960s, it affected China's engagement with Africa during the Cold War. In its ideological rivalry with the Soviets, China pushed its brand of communism and vied to become the primary supporter of anti-colonial movements; both China and the USSR competed for influence among newly independent African states. China promoted a different model of communism – one that was more attractive to developing nations. It encouraged self-reliance, rural development and anti-imperialism, contrasting with the Soviet Union's focus on industrialisation and state control. China's communist ideology resonated with many African nations' anti-colonial struggles, laying a foundation to forge ties based on shared experiences of oppression and the pursuit of self-determination. During this period, African countries did not exclusively align with China or the USSR; instead, many chose to diversify their partnerships – maintaining relations with both sides and avoiding over-reliance on either communist power. However, depending on the ideological prescriptions of a country's leaders and the military, and the development support

provided by either side, some countries leaned more towards either the USSR or China. For example, Angola, Ethiopia and Mozambique were closer to the USSR, while Tanzania, Zambia, Mali and Guinea aligned more with China.

As gestures of solidarity and to garner supporters for China's brand of communism, Beijing offered political and military support to select African liberation movements, and development aid to newly independent African states. For example, China provided substantial support to Angola's Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA); Mozambique's Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO); Zimbabwe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU); Namibia's South West People's Organisation (SWAPO); and it was a staunch supporter of South Africa's African National Congress's (ANC) struggle against apartheid. China also actively backed African nations' diplomatic efforts on the international stage, pushing for their recognition as independent states. At the time, given China's domestic and international political situation, its outreach to African countries served two primary goals: supporting Beijing's 'diplomatic battles' with Taiwan was key to avoiding a Two China Policy, and African backing was vital for China to gain UN membership (Alde and Alves 2008: 62).

Between December 1963 and February 1964, Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier He Long visited 10 African countries to: reinforce Beijing's opposition to imperialism; reiterate China's willingness to provide independent states with economic and technical aid; garner anti-Taiwan support; and restore China's rights in the UN (Kachiga 2013: 32; Yu 1988: 852). Visiting Ghana in 1964, Zhou further emphasised China's 'contributive role to Africa's development' (Yu 1988: 852); in return for China's support, new autonomous states began officially recognising Beijing (Johnston 2015: 385). And amidst the Cold War politics of the time, as China found '[its] niche in advocating for developing nations [to] which it proudly claimed to belong' (Kachiga 2013: 35), it presented itself as an alternative ally to the United States and USSR for newly independent African countries (Kachiga 2013: 35). However, the Sino-Indian War of 1962, although brief, brought into question the validity of non-alignment as a practice in foreign affairs; the NAM was called into

question, as two of its prominent members were at loggerheads, testing the group's cohesion (Adebajo 2024). Some African members, while officially non-aligned, strongly sympathised with India or China, for primarily ideological reasons. Those with more socialist leanings, such as Guinea and Mali, were more sympathetic towards China. In contrast, those wary of Chinese expansionism and aligning more with the USSR, such as Egypt, Ethiopia and Nigeria, were more supportive of India.

Economic cooperation

Resonating with one of the Ten Bandung Principles – 'promotion of mutual interests and cooperation' – China has, primarily through the Forum On China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), established significant economic and development cooperation with the African region, becoming a key economic partner over the past two decades. Like the NAM and G77, various FOCAC documents emphasise the promotion of economic and social development of developing countries (especially African economies), South–South cooperation and solidarity, respect for sovereignty, a multilateral world order, and opposition to hegemonic tendencies, especially by Western countries.

Since the 2015 FOCAC Summit, China has shifted its resource-focused strategy towards Africa to prioritise investments that boost the region's industrialisation. Although resource exportation remains the bedrock of economic ties, Beijing is adopting an 'intensive development' approach towards the region (Deng 2017). This complements many African states' desire to hasten development and improve their economic growth in line with development aspirations expressed in the AU's Agenda 2063. In accordance with Agenda 2063's aspiration of building an integrated continent connected by 'world-class infrastructure', the Chinese have focused on providing development finance to African states for building trade, energy and connectivity infrastructure (in partnership with Chinese companies), contributing significantly to Africa's structural economic transformation. No other country has been able to match or exceed China's contribution to developing African infrastructure. Between 2000 and 2020, China reportedly built and upgraded over 10 000 km of

railways, nearly 100 000 km of highways, about 1 000 bridges, close to 100 ports and more than 80 large-scale power facilities (Xinhua News 2022).

Beyond cooperation on infrastructure development, China–Africa trade has grown from strength to strength. China's trade relations with Africa became more prominent after the establishment of FOCAC in 2000. Since then, multi-million-dollar trade deals between China and African countries have become a standard practice. Under the impetus of FOCAC, in the 2000s China established eleven Trade Promotion Centers in the region, and Chinese businesses were (and continue to be) encouraged to pursue trade and investment with African states (Alden 2007: 14). Additionally, drawing on its development model, China has pioneered the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) across Africa, which are anticipated to serve as centres of investment and economic exchange between China and African economies.

In 2009, China surpassed the US as Africa's largest trading partner. However, in the context of Beijing's international trade profile, Africa remains a comparatively small trade partner for China (Alden et al. 2008: 10). Relative factor endowments of labour, capital and resources shape China–Africa trade patterns and, individually, each African country's trade arrangements with China (Shin and Eisenman 2012: 116). From a continental perspective – that is, looking at the China–Africa trade relationship with all 54 African states grouped together – the trade relationship is generally balanced (Shin and Eisenman 2012: 116). Yet, stark differences become apparent when the trade data is disaggregated. Based on comparative advantage, the trade balances between China and many African states convey an asymmetrical trade relationship that favours China (Lumumba-Kasango 2011). To address this, at the eighth FOCAC, held in Senegal in 2021, China prioritised improving trade relations by implementing measures to strengthen agricultural trade with the region, and it increased the scope of products from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) that would receive zero-tariff treatment (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation [FOCAC] 2021). The Chinese also committed US$10 billion towards deepening China–Africa trade and economic cooperation (FOCAC 2021). Building on this momentum to improve African trade with China, at the ninth FOCAC, held in Beijing in

2024, China announced that it would further open its market to 33 LDCs in Africa, which will receive zero-tariff treatment for 100 per cent of their tariff lines (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024). The further opening of the Chinese market to African products is intended to 'turn China's big market into Africa's big opportunity' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024a).

Respect for African sovereignty

Framing itself as an anti-imperialist ally and emphasising South–South cooperation, China has – in adherence with NAM principles – sought to engage with Africa on the principles of solidarity, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Thus far, China's non-interference approach has 'allowed Beijing to seek solidarity with African (and other developing) countries while at the same time distancing itself from what it usually considers "hegemonic" policies of the Western powers' (Gazibo and Lema 2023).

By adopting a non-interference approach to its political and economic dealings with the region, China positions itself as often the preferred development partner for many African countries, especially those with more authoritarian-leaning regimes, which are frequently criticised by Western governments for poor governance and human rights violations. Aside from having to prescribe to the One-China principle and avoiding criticism of sensitive Chinese domestic issues, Chinese lending to the region is mostly non-conditional. This has helped African countries reduce their dependence on conditional foreign (primarily Western) investments and aid, which are often tied to political and economic reforms that undermine African sovereignty, forcing African economies to prioritise donor demands for democratic reforms and economic liberalisation over their own national interests. Many African officials and leaders praise China's (mostly) non-conditional lending and non-interference approach, preferring it over the usually superior, imposing and lecturing disposition that the West has traditionally taken towards African countries (Alden 2019).

However, some research indicates that it may be challenging for the Chinese to adhere strictly to their principle of non-interference (Gazibo and Lema 2022: 2). For example, during the build-up to the 2006 Zambian presidential election, the then Chinese ambassador, Li Baodong, threatened to sever ties with Zambia if the country elected the late Michael Sata, who was highly critical of China and touted anti-China sentiments during his campaign (Reed 2006). And, during the 2018 Sierra Leone presidential election, the opposition party – Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) – reported that China provided 'material and financial assistance' to the ruling All People's Congress (APC), which has long-standing ties with Beijing (SLPP Today 2018). Additionally, the SLPP criticised China for its 'overt political interference' in Sierra Leone's domestic politics (SLPP Today 2018). Such incidents cast doubt on whether China can genuinely respect African sovereignty and uphold NAM principles of non-intervention and non-interference. Under the tacit assumption of reciprocity, if China deviates drastically from its non-interference approach toward Africa, it could jeopardise its strategic all-weather partnership with the region. This would have notable geopolitical consequences, greatly reducing China's influence relative to the United States and its allies in leading and shaping the development of a multipolar world order.

Support for greater African representation in multilateral organisations

In advocating for reforms in the governance structures of international organisations, the Chinese have consistently maintained that these reforms should focus on increasing the representation of developing countries. In this regard, China (along with other Global South heavyweights, especially India) has been a strong supporter of increasing the representation of African nations in international organisations. This supports the G77's goal of advocating for reform of multilateral institutions such as the UN, Bretton Woods organisations and the WTO, which were originally designed to benefit the American–Euro world order after the Cold War and are arguably not fit for purpose in the twenty-first-century international system (Group of 77 and China 2024).

China has promoted African representation in international forums

by lobbying member states to support African candidates and causes. The Chinese have also voted in favour of African candidates for leadership roles in organisations, such as the UN and its agencies, and they have also advocated for expanding the UN Security Council (UNSC) to include permanent seats for African countries (Klomegah 2024). At the UNSC Open Debate on Peace and Security in Africa in 2019, China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, stated that the UNSC 'should listen more to African voices, respect their opinions and let them play their roles' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019). Expanding the UNSC's permanent seats to include more African representation would strengthen the African voice in global decision-making, especially on peace and security issues. The US also supported the notion that Africa should have two permanent seats on the UNSC. However, this gesture is considered somewhat half-hearted, as it did not support these seats having veto power. It seemed the US made a paltry attempt to improve ties with Africa and its Pacific Island countries to counter China's growing regional influence (Nichols 2024).

Additionally, China has supported the AU's efforts to strengthen its role in regional and global affairs, and has actively engaged with the AU and its member states on various issues, including peace and security, economic development and human rights. China has also supported the AU's efforts to obtain Group of Twenty (G20) membership. At the G20 Summit held in Indonesia in November 2022, China's President, Xi Jinping, explicitly stated that 'China supports the African Union in joining the G20'. Under India's chairmanship, the AU officially became a member of the G20 in 2023 (China Daily 2022). Within the rules-based multilateral trading system promoted by the WTO, China has, on several occasions, advocated for African countries' interests, particularly in negotiations on agriculture, textiles and intellectual property rights. Also benefiting Africa, China has used its growing influence to push for policies that benefit developing countries, such as special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions (She 2023).

Although China's efforts to promote African representation and interests in international organisations are acknowledged and praised by African leaders, some international affairs commentators and critics opine that it is motivated by self-interest and conditional on African

countries supporting China's own interests – indicating a type of quid pro quo relationship between the two sides in international settings (Konings 2007: 360).

Africa: China's partner in shaping the development of a multipolar world order

As China has steadily risen to become a major power, it has advocated for a multipolar world system in which the sovereignty of each country is respected. Simultaneously, it has consistently voiced its disapproval of hegemonic behaviour and international institutions (such as the World Bank and IMF) that seek to maintain the US-led hegemonic international order. China's revisionist vision of an international system resonates with many Global South countries, especially African nations, which have been marginalised by the neoliberal American–Euro-led international system and have not received significant economic development dividends from it.

China's efforts to push for a multipolar world order and reform global governance settings to reflect said order rest partly 'on its ability to enlist Global South support for its [international] initiatives' (Nantulya 2023). In this regard, Africa en bloc is a crucial ally, because 'Africa is the largest bloc in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly with 28 per cent of the votes compared to Asia's 27 per cent, the Americas' 17 per cent, and Western Europe's 15 per cent. Africa also holds over a quarter of the votes in all UN governing bodies, and it is the largest bloc in other agencies, such as the WTO, the Group of 77, and the Non-Aligned Movement. This makes African votes critically important to Chinese efforts to redesign global institutions' (Nantulya 2023).

The Chinese have especially relied on African support in addressing human rights issues at the UN (Nantulya 2023). In 2020, all African UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR) members (except for one – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which abstained) voted in favour of another Chinese resolution, 'Promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights', which included elements of Xi Jinping's Thought on Human Rights (Nantulya 2023; Roberts 2023; Introvigne 2022).[2] During the 2019/2020 and 2021/2022 UN debate cycles, no

African country supported a series of draft communiques critical of Chinese policies in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong (Nantulya 2023). In October 2022, only Somalia among African countries voted in favour of a resolution to hold a UNHRC debate on China's alleged human rights violations in Xinjiang; however, the proposal did not pass, as most of the African group voted against it (Nantulya 2023). Additionally, the Chinese and African groups have supported each other in securing leadership roles within the UN and increasing each other's representation in various UN organs and programmes (Nantulya 2023). China-Africa cooperation has also been fruitful in other multilateral settings, specifically the WTO. For example, in 2019, the 43-member Africa Group joined China in adopting a resolution that opposed US veto power over appointments to the WTO's Appellate Body, the world's highest trade court; this increased the number of WTO members opposing the US veto to 114 out of 163 members (Nantulya 2020: 502).

Chinese officials on African tours and at FOCAC events often emphasise the importance of Chinese and Africans supporting each other in global governance. Amongst the four-point agenda of then Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang's five-nation African tour in January 2023 was 'mutual support in the global governance system' (Nantulya 2023). Before this, at the seventh FOCAC in 2018, China and its African partners agreed to 'work together to promote the reform of the global governance system' (Nantulya 2020: 502). Africa's common position on international reform is outlined in the AU's 2005 Ezulwini Consensus, and although it adopts a much narrower position than China's view, both China and the AU, nonetheless, seem to believe that the current global system is 'weighted against them' (Nantulya 2020: 502). This shared grievance, according to Wang Yi, the Chinese Foreign Minister, makes Africa a 'natural ally of China' (Nantulya 2020: 502).

Several official documents between China and its African counterparts reiterate both sides' mutual support in multilateral forums and on international issues. The China–Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 document (published in 2021 by China's Ministry of Commerce) expresses both sides' shared support for 'economic globalization and an

equitable, open and inclusive multilateral trading system, firmly opposing unilateralism and protectionism and safeguarding the common interests of developing countries' (FOCAC 2021). The *China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals* document published by the PRC's State Council Information Office in 2021 noted, 'China and Africa are important partners in advancing the reform of the global governance system and reshaping the international order', and that 'China and Africa firmly support an increase in the representation and say of developing countries in the international governance system, especially African countries' (PRC State Council Information Office 2021). FOCAC-related documents also express similar sentiments. For example, the Dakar Action Plan (from the eighth FOCAC, held in 2021) reaffirmed that China and African countries (that have diplomatic relations with Beijing) will 'continue to support each other in international affairs and major international elections', and that both sides will 'continue to step up coordination and collaboration at the United Nations and other multilateral institutions' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021). Building on this, the Beijing Action Plan (from the ninth FOCAC, held in 2024) expressed stronger rhetoric on South–South cooperation, especially Chinese support for African countries 'in increasing their influence and role in global governance' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). The document also expressed that more inclusive multilateral frameworks are needed to address the world's problems and that the Chinese believe 'that Africans are qualified to serve as heads of international organisations and institutions, and supports their work' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). Furthermore, both sides expressed the need 'for necessary reform and strengthening of the UN including the Security Council, redressing the historical injustices done to Africa, and increasing the representation of developing countries, African countries in particular, in the UN and its Security Council' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). Concerning the reformation of the international financial system, both sides called for 'reforming the international financial system and improving development financing for countries in the Global South to realise common prosperity and better meet the development needs of African countries' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). To do so, the Chinese and African

sides expressed intentions to 'take an active part in and promote reform of the multilateral financial institutions, including quota, special drawing rights, and voting rights reform of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). Both sides also expressed the need to increase the representation and voice of developing countries in these organisations, to enable the international monetary and financial systems 'to better reflect the changes in the international economic landscape in a more just way' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). To achieve this, both China and African states committed to enhancing 'cooperation to ensure a comprehensive reform of the Global Financing Governance system that responds to the specific needs of developing countries' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b).

Leveraging the NAM and G77 to build an Afro-Sino coalition to advance the development of a multipolar world order

In this era of geopolitical competition unfolding alongside multiple polycrises, coalition-building among developing countries to advance common positions on global governance and trade regimes – and to shape international governance structures to be more inclusive – is becoming more critical. Coalition politics is a strategic tool for rising powers (such as China) that seek to (in line with their geopolitical and geoeconomic interests) gain favour with other countries, especially developing states, to bolster their rivalry with other rising powers or incumbent global hegemons (specifically the US) (Taksashi 2021). In the context of global power transitions, coalition-building and, by association, coalition politics, are organic symptoms of power transitions and are leveraged by both hegemonic and revisionist powers to accrue support in tussles for geopolitical supremacy. For revisionist powers such as China, which seeks to establish a new world order, China-supportive coalitions will be key in achieving this – particularly in reshaping international governance structures to reflect a multipolar world (Schweller and Pu 2011: 44–46). Within international institutions, Taksashi (2021) posits that coalition politics can be understood through three scopes: (1) an inter-coalition scope that speaks to the fate of the (neo-) liberal international order, (2)

an intra-coalition scope with interest in the cohesion of specific clusters of countries, and (3) a state-centric scope that focuses on foreign policy dynamics. It is within category one that this section ruminates (below) on building an Afro-Sino coalition, underpinned by the Ten Bandung Principles within the NAM and G77, to advance China's and Africa's shared goal of actualising a fair and just multipolar world order that is more inclusive of the Global South.

Building on their shared ideological and normative visions of a multipolar world order, where fair and just multilateral cooperation is central to addressing global challenges, the Africa Group in the NAM and G77 should develop a coordinated plurilateral approach to engaging with China within these organisations' frameworks (as well as other multilateral settings) to advance African developmental and political interests. To effectively leverage China within the NAM and G77, African members of these organisations must coordinate efforts to develop a shared strategy or policy for navigating dealings with China within NAM and G77 parameters. This would make engagements with the Chinese within these two organisations leaner and more focused and serve as a bi-regional coalition-building mechanism on various multilateral and geopolitical issues where the two sides share common views or stances – effectively creating an Africa–China caucus within the NAM and G77.

As the Chair of the NAM from 2024 to 2027, Uganda is positioned to pursue its own and collective African interests in these organisations. Through facilitating high-level dialogues and discussions, the Ugandans can rally Africa en bloc in the NAM and G77 to strategically engage with China in influencing and shaping the development of a multipolar world order. Of course, achieving this would require significant collective diplomatic efforts and a considerable amount of political will from all African members. However, given the power imbalances between China and African countries, such efforts are necessary if African countries are to avoid being mere pawns in China's geostrategic calculations, and to ensure that, at the very least, cooperation is mutually beneficial within the parameters of the NAM and G77. This would strengthen African agency vis-à-vis China and could potentially generate a snowball effect, encouraging African countries to unite strategically in other international

organisations to better navigate interactions with major and emerging powers, especially amid competing geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures from various actors.

In efforts to assert active non-alignment while still pursuing cooperation with China within the NAM and G77 amid increasing scrutiny from the US, the Africa Group in both organisations must be proactive and assume much of the responsibility in leveraging the NAM and G77 to serve as an Afro-Sino bi-regional coalition-building mechanism (while remaining sensitive to Euro–American geopolitical interests regarding a perceived revisionist China [and Russia]). To maintain relations with all viable development partners from the East and West, African countries must strategically leverage cooperation with China within the NAM and G77 to promote a multipolar world order. Engagements with the Chinese in these organisations must not be perceived as a praxis for geopolitical collusion against the US. Doing so would undoubtedly endanger NAM and G77 African members' diplomatic relations with Washington and its allies, jeopardising development partnerships and financing. And it would also bring the integrity of the NAM (in its entirety) as a non-aligned entity into disrepute.

On the sidelines of the NAM and G77 events and summits – through co-hosting parallel events, closed and open meetings, and workshops – Chinese and African officials and policymakers can deliberate and strategise on how to further their shared agenda of advocating for a multipolar world order, underpinned by a reformed multilateral international system that is more inclusive and representative of the Global South, especially Africa. From the African side, much thought needs to be given to how to build a coalition with China amidst a tense geopolitical climate where a rising China – despite its 'peaceful rise' rhetoric – increasingly finds itself butting heads with the United States (and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] allies), with whom many African countries have political and diplomatic ties. To uphold active neutrality amid US–China tensions, the NAM and G77 African groups must delineate common cooperation interests with the Chinese within NAM and G77 parameters. Importantly, in cooperating with the Chinese to realise a multipolar world, the African side must firmly maintain non-

threatening and non-aggressive approaches in line with international law. This will help preserve the integrity of African members' non-aligned stance, balance cooperation with China, and maintain sound relations with the US and allied countries.

Recommendations

African NAM and G77 members must collectively produce a prudent guiding document on engaging with China to further African developmental, political, economic and geostrategic interests. As the current chair, Uganda can lead the coordination of the Africa blocs in the NAM and G77 to deliberate on developing a common African engagement strategy within each organisation. The production of a comprehensive and pragmatic guiding document must be informed by robust consultation among African members and consultations between the African and Chinese sides. To this end, African working groups can be established to determine key areas of cooperation with the Chinese within the NAM and G77, under six themes: Economic Development and Trade; Peace and Security; Climate and Environmental Challenges; Medical and Public Health; Next-Generation Technology and Development; and Global Governance Reformation. To ensure that each thematic working group is not just a talking club, African countries must commit significant resources to coordinating the groups in developing a common African agenda and planning for the furthering of shared interests with the Chinese in the NAM and G77 (and potentially other multilateral organisations).

Cooperation agendas under each thematic area noted above must be lean. Instead of curating long wish lists for cooperation, the Africans (in consultation with the Chinese) should identify a maximum of five cooperation items for each theme. And, importantly, at the very least, from the African side, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms must be established to measure the effectiveness of cooperation with the Chinese within the NAM and G77. African members can gather every three years – the same timeline as the triannual FOCAC – to deliberate on the cooperation agendas under each thematic area. Based on information

from monitoring and evaluation reports, the cooperation agendas can be revised and updated in line with African and Chinese interests.

A common African agenda or plan outlining engagement with China within the NAM and G77 must be a product of careful deliberations, acknowledging shared or common development and geostrategic interests with the Chinese, and – in the interests of preserving relations with the US and allied countries – stipulate the African sides' limits of cooperation with Beijing, if any. This would assert African agency (at least on paper) and provide a practical and pragmatic guiding policy document for collective African action vis-à-vis China within the NAM and G77. However, producing such a document is easier said than done. Since the Africa groups in the NAM and G77 are not homogenous, as each sovereign member has varying developmental levels, socio-economic priorities, geopolitical interests, and divergent peace and security agendas, trying to develop a common African strategy regarding China within the parameters of the NAM and G77 is a challenging task that would need extensive negotiation and compromise on the part of African members.

Just as the Chinese carefully scrutinise international documents and communiques to reflect their stance on sensitive domestic issues, the African side must, in the interest of international optics and allaying US and allied countries' geopolitical concerns, employ African international relations and geopolitical experts to draft or inform an African NAM and G77 strategy regarding China. To maintain and strengthen good relations with the US, EU and UK, which are key trade and investment partners for Africa, careful consideration must be given to the language and wording employed, to avoid risking any perception that African NAM and G77 members are strongly allying with China; this would, without a doubt, bring the NAM and its ethos of non-alignment into disrepute.

Conclusion

Based on their shared ideological and normative visions of a multipolar world order, in which fair and just multilateral cooperation is central to addressing global challenges, Africa and China can forge a formidable coalition to challenge the dominance of an international system that has

historically marginalised the Global South. Through the NAM and G77, and in line with the Ten Bandung Principles, the Africa grouping within these organisations can develop a coordinated plurilateral approach to engaging with China and promoting their shared goal of establishing a multipolar world order by reforming global governance institutions, while also working together to address urgent international economic, political, security, environmental and health challenges. What will be interesting to observe is how the process of initiating and coordinating an Afro–Sino coalition within the frameworks of the NAM and G77 unfolds. It is likely to further clarify how China perceives African countries – whether as pawns or partners. More importantly, the main challenge will be whether African countries can genuinely unite to meet the challenge, overcome their differences and position the continent as a significant force in relation to China (and other middle and major powers of the Global South).

Although the NAM and G77 can serve as platforms of convergence for the Africans and Chinese to convene and deliberate on strategic manoeuvres for advancing a more equitable and inclusive multipolar world that is more responsive to the needs of developing countries, African countries must engage tactfully with the Chinese. Considering the unstable geopolitical climate and the key relationships with American–Euro partners who are sceptical of China's rise and somewhat resistant to a multipolar world order that diminishes their power and influence, African countries must become skilled at diplomatic gymnastics. They need to take an active role in shaping engagements with China within the NAM and G77, in order to influence the future of international governance and avoid becoming mere pawns that can be easily coalesced to advance China's strategic interests. Simultaneously, embodying a spirit of active non-alignment, African countries must strategically maintain and sustain cooperation with American and European partners outside the NAM and G77 to avoid alienating important development and trade partners.

Importantly, in tag-teaming with China within the NAM and G77 to advance a multipolar order, African agency must be robust enough to counterbalance China's outsized power vis-à-vis individual African countries. In this regard, drawing on the adage that a united Africa is a strong Africa, African countries in the NAM and G77 must actively

deliberate and strategise on how to approach and engage with the Chinese within NAM and G77 frameworks. In this regard, a common African guiding strategy document would help African states collectivise and speak with one voice when dealing with China in NAM and G77 settings. It will assist African stakeholders in the NAM and G77 to organise themselves, engage strategically with China, and ensure that in promoting their common vision of a multipolar world and reforms in major international governance and financial organisations, Africa is fully represented in all decision-making bodies of these organisations, rather than simply being used by the Chinese as a stepping stone to enhance their influence and positions in international institutions.

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Endnotes

1 Active non-alignment or active neutrality is a foreign policy strategy that aims to balance relations with often competing geopolitical blocs or countries, while maintaining independence and avoiding formal alliances. Unlike traditional neutrality, which often implies taking a stance of passivity, active non-alignment involves taking a proactive approach to global affairs, seeking to influence and shape global decision-making and events, and promote national interests without being beholden to any actor. Adhering to active non-alignment (in its truest sense) allows countries: to maintain autonomy in decision-making, avoiding pressure or influence from competing powers; balance relationships with major powers and avoid excessive dependence on any one actor or geopolitical bloc; and proactively engage in international forums unencumbered by pressures from competing powers to 'choose a side' and actively shape global discourses in line with national interests. Countries adopting this approach often prioritise multilateral cooperation and seek to leverage international institutions to advance their geopolitical interests. For a comprehensive description and understanding of active non-alignment see: Fortin, C., Heine, J. and Ominami, C. (eds). 2022. Latin American foreign policies in the new world order: The active non-alignment option. London: Anthem Press, p. 310.

2 Xi Jinping Thought, officially known as 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era', is the dogmatic ideology currently shaping the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Based on 14 guiding principles derived from Xi's views and writings on political and economic thought, Xi Jinping Thought is viewed as a framework for guiding China's development and enhancing its position in international affairs. By combining Marxist ideas with traditional Chinese Confucian values, Xi Jinping Thought emphasises the importance of duty, social harmony and development over individual human rights.

CHAPTER 5

Theorising African Agency from the Perspective of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77

Mawia William Sila
University of Nairobi, Kenya

Introduction and marginality of Africa

Due to Africa's marginality in international relations, the question of its agency among its bilateral and multilateral partners has dominated studies, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. From a historical perspective, the epistemology of IR theories often privileged the agency of the Global North while relegating the agency of the Global South, including Africa, and thus relegating the Global South to the periphery of theory and practice of IR. Morgenthau (1948) has been quoted as stating that Africa was 'an empty space' before the First World War. The sentiments by Morgenthau were also echoed by Kenneth Waltz (1979), considered a structural realist, who was quoted in his book *Theory of International Politics* as saying it would be ridiculous to try to construct a theory of international relations based on Malaysia and Costa Rica. This perspective denigrates regions in the Global South, including Africa. The exclusion of Africa from the epistemic core of IR was not accidental.

As cited by Danso and Aning (2022), American political scientist Samuel Huntington once questioned the presence of civilisation in Africa, arguing that the powers that shape world politics are seven or eight, and Africa is absent. This Eurocentric argument seems to connote that there is no historical basis for the establishment of a theory of IR in Africa. However, as will be discussed in this chapter, the NAM and G77 provided an epistemic correction to address this misconception and reconstruct an African epistemic ideology. According to Sidiropoulos (2009), Africa has

been quoted as a passive actor in crucial international affairs, including during the Cold War. During this tense period between the United States and the Soviet Union, Africa, in line with its NAM policy, remained neutral in a significant crisis pitting the two superpowers against each other. The relevance of conventional IR theories as dispassionate solutions to Africa's challenges has been assessed – and often points to the need for alternative voices. Frequently, Eurocentric voices have obfuscated the voices and experiences of African voices, necessitating the broadening of IR theories for the Global South, void of Western-centric theories and voices. Croft (1997) suggests that the marginalisation of Africa is perhaps due to the continent's lack of participation in matters of military security and international political economy. Yet, Africa's trajectory through the G77 and NAM contradict this narrative.

The continent has established a comprehensive peace and security architecture that is guiding it to address security challenges that form part of the international discourse. The continent, with half of the world's internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Norwegian Refugee Council 2023), established the African Union (AU) Convention for the Protection of IDPs, the first legally binding treaty globally to address issues of internal displacement, demonstrating Africa's rise to challenge the view that it is absent in significant matters of international relations. This demonstrates that Africa's theoretical contribution to IR is alive and is contributing to core issues of concern. Based on this, arguments around Africa's epistemological exclusion are becoming increasingly untenable in the twenty-first century. The insecurity on the continent, in part, shapes how the complexities of the binaries are reflected in how other actors perceived the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South. However, as studies have demonstrated, it has been a major mistake to marginalise Africa due to its perceived lack of political power and contribution to IR theories. For instance, regarding the use of technology in the fight against criminal activities and insecurity, Ouma and Mawia (2023) argue that Africa has demonstrated that technology can be used in the fight against insurgency in the Sahel region, where different groups have wreaked havoc, displacing thousands in Mali and

neighbouring countries. Croft's argument that Africa does not have a role in military security is becoming increasingly irrelevant. After the Cold War, Africa has, yet again, become the centre of a proxy war between the United States and Russia, following the setting up of a military base in Djibouti by the United States. At the same time, Russia has continued to make inroads in the Sahel through the deployment of private military companies such as the Wagner Group across several African states. With the US controlling the Suez Canal, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf via Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, Russia is attempting to access the Atlantic Ocean via the Sahel, demonstrating how significant the continent is to matters of military security, as argued by Ezenwa and Ojo (2024). The NAM and G77 are seen as an attempt to theorise Africa within a distinct southern epistemology built around African voices and experiences. Africa's engagement in the NAM and G77 demonstrate an alternative voice grounded in the pursuit of a just international order. It is a demonstration that Africa can contribute through norm- and agenda-setting and not just as a peripheral participant.

Immediately after independence, Africa became the centre of attention at the height of the Cold War, a period characterised by acute geopolitical tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. With the capitalist West led by the United States and the communist East led by the Soviet Union, newly independent states in the Global South were caught in another subjugation in a bipolar world. Unequal trade and conditional aid dominated the world at the height of the Cold War. In response, the NAM and G77 emerged in the early 1960s, representing a significant shift from colonial dependency to non-alignment. The NAM, formally established at the First Summit, held between 1 and 6 September 1961 in Belgrade, and drawing upon the principles agreed upon during the Bandung Conference held between 18 and 24 April 1955, was seen as instrumental in championing international peace and security. However, even before it could be adequately established, Eurocentric critics believed the NAM was a pro-Soviet institution established to counter the West.

Waters (2001) argues that the questions of decolonisation and the enduring effects of the Cold War were sharply highlighted during the Bandung Conference. These very issues would later define the NAM.

As was the case with the Pan-Africanist movement that championed the ending of colonialism, the NAM was primarily driven by the need to end colonialism due to the prospect of an enduring legacy of perpetual colonialism. With the end of the Cold War in 1991, there were questions about the validity of the NAM. As Handley (1998) notes, a significant question arose following the end of the Cold War: 'Aligned against what?' Terms such as 'irrelevant, substantially redundant, or anachronistic' were used to describe the NAM, to dissuade its conveners from pursuing the ideals that had founded the movement (Keethaponcalan 2016). With political and intellectual capital from leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Sekou Touré of Guinea, the NAM became a vehicle to express its agency beyond individual states. In 2012, an article published on *Al Jazeera* titled 'The Non-Aligned Movement realigns in Tehran?' sparked debate as to the direction of the NAM, as noted by Khan (2012).

The Group of 77 at the United Nations was established in New York on 11 November 1963 by the G77 countries during the creation of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). These countries were agitating for, as highlighted by Ahmia (2014), among other things, the articulation and promotion of common economic issues at the United Nations (UN). The postcolonial economic world, which provided privileges for industrialised nations at the expense of newly independent states through unfair financial systems and terms of international trade, propelled the establishment of the G77. Conditional lending and macroeconomic perceptions from Bretton Woods Institutions – the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – perpetuated and reinforced dependency among these African states. Most African countries, by the 1960s, were dealing with the baggage of postcolonialism and hence were working with weak economies. They were thus unable to fully leverage the platforms offered by both the NAM and G77. The continued economic dependency exhibited by these African countries continued the marginalisation, as these countries were limited in their assertion of fair and balanced trade. Across Africa, while countries signed up to the NAM and G77, their economic focus has also played a key role in the overall marginalisation, as the countries are all engaged in various

agreements with both the West and the East (the United States, European Union, Russia and China).

Access to technology has been skewed, with the West faring more favourably than Africa, thus denying the region an opportunity to compete more fairly. According to Lee et al. (2022), the digital divide in Africa continues to stifle universal access and the use of emerging technologies, thus denying the continent much-needed development. It also continues to contribute to the region's marginalisation, as the world is now being propelled forward by technology. Other factors demonstrating the need for the NAM and the G77 include concerns around neocolonialism, particularly regarding debt distress in developing and low-income countries. Drezner (2007) argues that global institutions have conferred significant benefits upon the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, again demonstrating the need for continued vigilance and the relevance of a reformed NAM. When it was founded, the G77 called for the establishment of the UN-adopted New International Economic Order to advocate for fair trade, technology transfer and greater control of natural resources in the Global South.

The intellectual engagement of African leaders in both the G77 and NAM helped to frame African agency as the capacity to create consensus, offering an alternative voice and theory in IR. This view, bolstered by Nyerere's *Ujamaa,* Senghor's *Negritude* and Nkrumah's *Consciencism*, portrays Africa's approach to IR through the lens of equality and international cooperation. Despite Africa being viewed through a peripheral lens by the West, China has advanced and made inroads since the Cold War. These inroads have resulted in the growth of Africa–China trade in both exports and imports, improving the continent's bargaining power internationally. Oyintarelado et al. (2024) highlight that, between 2000 and 2022, trade between the two regions grew from US$11.67 billion at the turn of the millennium to US$257.67 billion in 2022. Another entrant into Africa is India, whose trade with Africa grew significantly, reaching US$103 billion by 2023, as noted by Nantulya (2023), who highlights the significant jump from US$40 billion in 2009. As Ampiah and Naidu (2008) note, China's involvement in Africa has been debatable. Despite this debate around the role of China in the African continent, it

has also shifted Africa's bargaining power on the global scene, allowing the continent to address the perceived invincibility.

One of China's models of operations has been the heavy funding of infrastructure in Africa. In Africa, debt-stricken countries have made strategic moves to waive their loans from international financial institutions for more conditional free funds from China. Ross and Reid (2021) highlight how China is funding significant infrastructure projects among beleaguered regimes in Africa through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative. The role played by the World Bank and the IMF in denying sovereign power to African countries due to inflexible terms of development financing is perhaps what has emboldened countries like China to make forays into the continent. Africa's theoretical invincibility in IR could have become a blessing in disguise. In addition to opening the space for other players such as China and India to make inroads into the continent, Arieff et al. (2010) note that Africa fared better and was more resilient than the Global North during the global financial crisis. Despite this cushioning, certain aspects of the economies, including fuel, food and financials, were concomitantly affected during the crisis, according to Kasekende et al. (2009). As noted by Engel and Olsen (2004), the marginalisation of Africa, propelled by Africa's history, is also characterised by African participation in international trade due to globalisation. Africa has not been alone on the marginalisation agenda.

The Pacific islands have also been marginalised, despite their ability to produce knowledge. For instance, knowledge from the islands is seen as being less prolific than that from the West, despite the region having developed its form of philosophy, called *Whakapapa* (the Māori way of knowing and being in the world and the interconnectedness of the world) and *Kaitiakitanga* (the Māori view of environmental ethics, natural resource management and sustainability). Additionally, countries like China have also developed philosophies of their own, one that has seen China teach Mandarin through the Confucius Institute to spread the philosophy of China. In South America, another emerging philosophy, the *buen vivir* (originating from indigenous cultures in South America), is emphasising harmony with nature to enhance well-being within communities, in response to years of relentless exploitation of natural resources.

Onuf (2002), while discussing the homogeneity of IR, argues that major issues of IR theories are historically and socially constructed. The exclusion of Africa is also depicted in the words of Mo Ibrahim, who questions why negative reportage around the crisis in Sudan's Darfur region, Somalia, or the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo should be generalised to represent a continent of 53 countries (Bedell 2009). While reflecting on the enduring legacy of the Rwanda Genocide, Gourevitch (1998) notes that there has been a major misconception that Africa is only able to produce sensationalised stories of death and poverty, and nothing more. It is this misconception that has resulted in the continued marginalisation of Africa.

Ontology and epistemology of African agency

The existing debate around Africa's agency in international relations cannot be divorced from the region's complex ontology and epistemological reality. This is because, for far too long, the region's identity internationally has been constructed by voices outside of the region, and from a lens that is too often biased. To understand African agency in IR, one therefore needs to reflect deeper on the philosophical foundations that define African knowledge systems. According to Crotty (2003), ontology is the 'study of the being'. It is focused on the structure of reality and the kind of world under investigation. This position is complemented by Guba and Lincoln (1989), who opine that ontological assumptions concern what can be known, and the nature of reality. Ontologically, theorising African agency from the perspective of the NAM and G77 highlights a very complex and profoundly multifaceted relationship, defined by the collective voice of African nations seeking to get autonomy from the North. It also defines African voices as rooted in collective unity. Rising from a past characterised by the dehumanising reality of the slave trade and colonialism, Africa continues to shape its 'being' in the international space through contemporary African diplomacy. From the 2005 Ezulwini Consensus on the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC's) reforms (advocating for two permanent seats at the UNSC) to the 2024 common positions on climate change (to address complex intersection of climate

change, peace and security), Africa has demonstrated a spirit of collective bargaining. Epistemology, conversely, is concerned with understanding what we know, and provides a philosophical ground for what kinds of knowledge are possible and adequate at any given time. The G77 and NAM have epistemologically enabled African agency to assert itself from the basis of solidarity as opposed to nationalism. Despite Africa being visible, including endorsement of a South–South cooperation in which African states can negotiate with other regions on a more equal footing – including in forums such as the China–Africa Cooperation Forum (FOCAC) – arguments continue to connotate that big powers are the ones that can construct a theory of IR. However, caution remains that overstretching these engagements can hurt Africa's agency and reduce its bargaining power.

Tickner and Blaney (2013) argue that Western scholarship continues to dominate the ontology and epistemology of IR theories. It is thus seen as a deliberate move to delegitimise knowledge from other parts of the world. As noted by Smith (2018), the issues from Africa are essential to understanding how the region has contributed to theoretical development. Indeed, the continent has long been viewed through the lenses of civil wars, the slave trade, globalised diseases and hunger, among others (Sharman 2024). Economic structural approaches such as the World Systems Theory and the Dependency Theory tend to focus on the exploitative nature of the global economies concerning Africa, with a view that Africa is on the periphery of global influence, as noted by Dunn (2001), who argued that Africa can only act to the extent that it is acted upon. These descriptions have served to exclude Africa and, therefore, the rise of the NAM and G77 has been important to address this exclusion and absence. Traditional IR concepts, such as the state and sovereignty, are often problematic when applied to the lens of Africa. Progressively, it's been noted that for one to build a Western-centric theory, scholars have frequently denigrated Africa and relegated it to the margins. Despite being viewed as marginal in IR issues, Africa is at the core of the conversation around the climate emergency, as it bears the brunt of a warming globe, alongside small and developing island nations.

The question of colonialism and its role in marginalising Africa must

be seen not just from the lens of occupation but also in relation to the colonisation of minds and establishment of Western-centric knowledge as the legitimate source of knowledge. The 'collapsing' of thousands of different African cultures to an 'African civilisation', as argued by Huntington (1996), must be challenged as it does not *Africanise* the continent, nor does it portray a complete picture of what constitutes the true Africa. This move to continually denigrate Africa and relegate it to the periphery is a deliberate path to ensure the African voice is stifled. The process of decolonising Africa should go beyond political independence to dismantling deeper powers at a cognitive level that continues to perpetuate Eurocentric knowledge as superior to African knowledge. The G77 and NAM have continued to theorise African agency as an independent voice. At the height of the Cold War, the NAM allowed space for Africa to navigate global politics without being caught in the polarising ideals of the face-off between the two superpowers, thus giving African countries the diplomatic flexibility to engage in development without being beholden to either power. Scholars from the African region, therefore, must continue to reimagine an Africa whose voice is heard. While most theorists have often used Western-centric views as the starting point for IR, in the words of Kaplan (2000), the oncoming anarchy will see people fall into nightmares due to their inability to adjust to the Western way of thinking. Again, this argument continues to perpetuate the denigration of Africa as a region that has no voice. While the African continent may have been freed from the colonial grip and gained independence as a region, with states becoming sovereign, Mignolo (2023) argues that the *people* are yet to be sovereign. He questions the lack of connection for the younger generation to understand the enduring impact of the slave trade, racism, colonialism and capitalism. As Tamale (2020) opines, decolonising the twenty-first century is a sure pathway to help connect the dots and find the missing links to bring to the fore the epistemic challenges that are missing for Africans to be able to speak their voices.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank and the IMF instituted Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) to integrate austerity measures focused on, among other things, the higher education sector. One of the most enduring legacies of the calls to decolonise higher education is the

Rhodes Must Fall campaign in 2015 at South Africa's University of Cape Town (Gopal 2021). The calls to decolonise universities is not an abstract idea but one grounded in the NAM's normative principle of highlighting the intellectual infrastructure within Africa's agency. Following the murder of George Floyd in the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement raised fundamental questions about people of colour's calls for equality. Among the African voices that have continually called for decolonisation of the mind and intellect is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986). Mamdani (2019) adds calls for universities to be true to the classical vision as a home of scholarship, driven by a desire to ensure that African universities are producing knowledge that could challenge Western-centric ideas and produce African-based knowledge. Despite the voices calling for decolonisation of knowledge in Africa and amplifying its voice, various voices have been used to portray the continent negatively. In the 2000s, *The Economist* described Africa as 'the hopeless continent', adding that despite the turn of the millennium, there was nothing to celebrate in the region, only more disasters. However, while the continent has suffered its fair share of challenges, such as the disproportionate burden of HIV and tuberculosis, as well as civil strife, it has also witnessed tremendous growth. With a predominantly young population, the region is set to record a population of around two billion people by 2050, with the majority being young and thus of a productive age.

The marginality of Africa is seen in the way it has been neglected in terms of knowledge production. According to Garwe et al. (2021), despite Africa being considered the cradle of humanity and home to ancient empires and kingdoms that pride themselves on being the bastion of knowledge and innovation, Africa only contributes 2 per cent of global knowledge. In response, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) argues that the theft and plunder of precious African artefacts have contributed to the loss of immense knowledge, resulting in the often-misplaced argument that Africa has no history. No wonder scholars such as Samuel Huntington could dare ask about Africa's lack of history. Additionally, as highlighted by Motsaathebe (2020), the failure of African leaders to deliberately change historical injustices that were meted out to Africans has led to a failure to address the more fundamental question of changing the Western

pedagogy, deeply rooted in African institutions of higher education. As previously mentioned, Mazrui (2002) and Ngũgĩ (1986) have called for the decolonisation of higher education institutions as an avenue to bring change. Ngũgĩ calls for a return to indigenous epistemologies, while Mazrui calls for indigenising curriculums to reflect African realities. For Africa to be genuinely non-aligned, it must endeavour to correct all historical injustices and work to contribute to knowledge at a global scale, but, more importantly, to begin to speak to itself. The quest to decolonise knowledge could be summed up with the African proverb by Chinua Achebe: 'Until the lion learns how to tell his story, the hunter will always be the hero.'

Simply put, Africa (the lion in Achebe's proverb) has always fallen victim to the hunter and has never been able to tell its side of the story. The decolonisation agenda seeks to tell that story. In the case of the NAM and G77, this presents an opportunity to transform African voices in the global IR arena as part of the core arguments. Despite African values such as *ubuntu* being developed to reconceptualise the view of Africa, structuralist theories such as the Classical Theory of Modernisation, popularised by Rostow (1971), proposed the stages of development, relegating Africa to the most basic (traditional stage). World Systems' Theory, proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein, who classified the world into 'the core' and 'the periphery', has often propagated Western-based views that Africa is in the periphery. The concept of *ubuntu,* which seeks to explain African solidarity, has spread across the region. According to Ghanaian academic Tieku (2012), from an ontological perspective, Western-centric IR scholars often apply an individualistic ontology that regularly negates and fails to factor in the African spirit of *ubuntu,* expressed in different words across the continent. According to Ngũgĩ (2012), coloniality, as it was designed, has continued to perpetuate two worlds, demonstrating a global power structure that has seen people from the West enjoy privileges while those from the African region essentially do not enjoy such privileges, as they come from the 'dark side' of the world.

The continued segregation and suppression of the African voice needs to be addressed. Coloniality has defined intersubjectivity relations and

knowledge production so much that journals from the West are referred to as 'reputable'. At the same time, those from the Global South are not acknowledged. Due to this subjective view, it is often argued that only knowledge published in these 'reputable' journals can be consumed authentically. Post the colonial era, few African scholars continue to qualify to publish in so-called 'high-impact' journals. A significant question that continues to linger is whether knowledge shared by African scholars can be verifiable in IR systems and whether that knowledge can help to address problems faced in the Global South. According to Hedt-Gauthier et al. (2019), a systematic review of over 7 000 articles indexed in the medical journal *PubMed* and published between 2014 and 2016 revealed that 13,5 per cent of the sampled papers did not include African authors, 68,3 per cent were from collaborating authors based in the West (US, Canada, Europe or Africa), and African authors had a lower likelihood of being a first author, at 23 per cent. This demonstrates a continued attempt to marginalise African knowledge, and an awakening that Africa can and is challenging this power dynamic.

It is therefore important, in advocating for African knowledge, to champion meaningful involvement from the conceptualisation stage to challenge power dynamics. Western languages have been viewed as carrying a more profound ideology. These ideological concerns were raised by Mazrui and Ngũgĩ when they argued for the 'Africanization' of education and the use of indigenous languages while teaching at Makerere University and the University of Nairobi, respectively, so much so that Ngũgĩ was ostracised and exiled by the then-Moi regime for calling for the scrapping of English in the University of Nairobi's Department of Literature. Across Africa, language has been used to define diplomatic alignments and policy orientations, with the Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone identities defining the region, resulting in intra-African diplomatic fragmentation, with alignment to former colonial powers. Using language as a tool for soft diplomacy is a strategy emerging as a pathway for Africa to assert its influence globally, as language transfers culture. However, in a region of over 2 000 languages, which language would best represent the more than 1,3 billion people? At the UN, language, a tool and symbol of power, identity and inclusion, reflects the

continued colonial inheritance of languages from the Global North to the South. From the African perspective, the clamour for the inclusion of Swahili as an official UN language is an important tool for soft power for Africa.

As noted by Edoho (2011), cultural hegemony has played a significant role in the slow decolonisation of the mind beyond colonialism. Knowledge and the colonial ideology are so deep that Africa and the Global South have not attempted to actively fight this ideology. After independence, newly independent states continued to create universities modelled around Western institutions. The result is that, while education was touted as the equaliser of all, the modelling of education on Western universities resulted in the stifling and silencing of African knowledge. This continued the perpetuation of the understanding that Africa is not a producer of knowledge but a consumer of Western-centric knowledge. According to Ayeni and Aborisade (2022), one of the biggest challenges African knowledge faces is that it is passed from one person to another through oral tradition. This simple 'flaw' in African knowledge has been overlooked, since many things passed from one person to another without proper records could be lost to translation. This explains why aspects such as African traditional worship was ostracised as witchcraft and, in its place, the Christian faith was introduced. The adoption of the 'African solutions to African problems' mantra by the Organisation of African Unity could be credited with being a major attempt to position Africa as a producer of alternative knowledge.

This mantra formed the foundation of later movements such as the NAM, under which Africans sought to remain neutral in the global struggle for power between the Soviet Union and the United States, while struggling to address pressing matters related to ending colonialism among remaining African states.

In addition to African knowledge being passed on from one generation to another by word of mouth, Bickton et al. (2019) opine that African research has become invisible because of limited financing to publish research findings, as well as the unwillingness by commercial indexing companies domiciled in the West to profile African-based research. To address these concerns, institutions such as the African Population and

Health Research Center (APHRC) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) have been established to house African researchers and become a hub for knowledge and research. However, much more must be done to replicate research across the continent, propel African knowledge, and map it in the world. This lack of profiling of African knowledge could be explained by what Andrews (2020) describes as epistemic imperialism, manifested by the tendency to theorise knowledge based on the superiority of race. This imperialism has seen many Africans theorise the region based on a skewed view perpetuated by the West. The lack of political will has also hampered knowledge production in Africa. When researchers spend countless hours generating data that gets censored under the guise of national security interests, this stifles any meaningful progress that could be made to contribute to knowledge production. Regarding research funding across the continent, Midega et al. (2021) note that, up until 2021, the continent had missed the funding commitment made in 2006 of at least 1 per cent of GDP going to research and development (R&D) initiatives. In 2021, R&D investment stood at 0,42 per cent of GDP, compared to the global average of 1,7 per cent. Other factors that have led to the relegation of African knowledge include the continued individualistic approach to African IR that neglects the group approach, thus continuing to perpetuate the marginalisation of Africa in IR. However, these assertions explain why Africa is leveraging both the G77 and NAM as platforms for collective advocacy. As highlighted by Muriithi (2007), while the collective spirit of *ubuntu* has been applied in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, as well as in the promotion of fundamental human rights, it remains on the fringes of mainstream IR theories on Africa. This marginalisation continues, despite a demonstration that Africa has charted its own path in addressing its most pressing issues.

From the G77 perspective, African states have caucused around issues of UN budgetary and reform debates to ensure fairness around decisions that could otherwise hurt developing states. Africa has applied this diplomacy to engage in the Cotton-4 initiative, which ensured fair prices for cotton farmers in Africa, particularly in Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali and Benin. Using the NAM and G77, African countries have also invoked

the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities', particularly on matters of climate justice and global inequalities. This demonstrates Africa's participation in global diplomacy at both ontological and normative levels. This also demonstrates Africa's desire to reframe global discussions about climate justice and international responsibility. As Ouma (2025) argues, for Africa to reclaim its intellectual sovereignty, it must transcend colonial categories within the global sphere. This is because Africa's agency is not just reactive but should be seen as part of the global production of knowledge that shapes global governance frameworks.

The great debates and Africa's marginalisation

The three great debates (the first, second and third debates) reflects how the mainstream theories of IR marginalised Africa. The first great debate – based on the 'WHAT of IR', as noted by Schmidt (2012) – pitted the idealists against the realists in the 1930s and 1940s. However, the realists triumphed when the Second World War broke out. While the idealists envisioned a world of everlasting peace, free from war, pain and suffering, the Second World War was painted as a severe anomaly in the idealist paradigm. According to Knight and Keating (2010), after the Second World War and during the height of the Cold War, realism became the dominant paradigm, with realists pointing out that the League of Nations, established following the Fourteen Points speech by President Woodrow Wilson, failed to cement the ideals of peace. With idealisms rooted in the prominent role of international organisations such as the League of Nations and later the United Nations, and the role such institutions play in peace and security, idealists argued that for there to be sustainable peace, all principles of democratic governance must be congregated together.

The impact of realism on IR was such that, at the height of the debate, Africa was constantly marginalised as being inconsequential. With scholars relying on realism to predict the world's future, Africa would continue to be neglected in action and through scholarship. However, realism did not anticipate the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new order. In the literature that followed the end of the Second World

War, Africa's importance to the world was reflected in the limited attention given to the continent in IR theories. Despite the lack of focus on Africa, a few scholars began to focus on the continent, specifically the Pan-African movement. Ajala (1973) notes that the group of scholars focused on the Pan-Africanism movement wanted to present to the world a true image of Africa, thereby contributing to the progress of civilisation. They also wanted to instil a spirit of pride among all Africans at a period when the continent had just emerged from colonialism. According to Handel (1990), these studies formed the basis for studies around 'weak states' in IR. In what is now a semantic problem, countries in Africa and other Global South regions are often described as 'weak states', 'developing states' and 'third-world countries', among other phrases. In contrast, those in the Global North are referred to as the 'developed world', 'first-class world' and 'superpowers', among other phrases, demonstrating how a semantic problem has resulted in a marginalisation problem.

According to Mazrui (1977), there was an attempt to explain the economic dependence of newly independent African states using various theories in the 1970s, including Wallerstein's world systems theory (Wallerstein 2011), which categorised Africa as being in the periphery, and the dependency theory that viewed resources as flowing from the periphery to the core, thus assuming a relationship between the core and the periphery, but one of oppression. This oppression prompted Rodney (1972) to focus on the exploitative nature of the relationship between Europe and Africa. This exploitative relationship has seen Africa's resources, especially mineral wealth, being used to develop other parts of the world. At the same time, people in Africa continue to wallow in extreme poverty. The relationship between the North and the South was seen as one that relegated African ideals as peripheral and analytically irrelevant. The second great debate, which focused on the 'HOW of IR', was launched by the behavioural revolutionists, who sought to predict the future after witnessing the devastating impacts of war. Focused on areas such as how to measure trends in politics, the economy and military development, the second debate led to the strengthening of research institutions, especially in the United States.

Often referred to as the Bull (traditionalist) versus Kaplan (behavioural-

ist) debate due to the role played by the two scholars (Neumann 1997), this debate saw Bull defend the classical approach to theory derived from law and philosophy, arguing that once one is restricted to the strictest standards of validation, there is little of importance that can be achieved. Kaplan, on the other hand, argued that such arguments would do nothing much to help in the development of a theory. This debate focused on adopting and applying scientific methods that used data, which served to marginalise Africa further, primarily due to the limited data available in Africa at the time. Additionally, the focus on state behaviour disadvantaged Africa, as many states on the continent were newly independent. The strengthening of research institutions such as the Rockefeller Foundation, among others, in the West focused on scientific research, leaving Africa out. The third great debate, also referred to as the 'inter-paradigm debate' (Wæver 1996) pitted realist, liberalist and Marxist theorists together. The debate in the 1970s and 1980s sought to assess whether Marxist and liberalist approaches could fit into a realist approach focused on state centrism. While the first two debates sought to entrench Western-centric theories of IR while neglecting the unique context of African states, this debate sought to address the question of the marginalisation of alternative epistemologies and methodologies, especially those that could capture the African experience better. One of the consequences of the third debate is the emergence of constructivism post-1990. According to Fierke (2010), constructivism developed as a reaction to the discussion and sought to break the barriers. The rise of various subfields of IR was because of an attempt to address the gaps and circumvent the gate-keeping that had been established by Western-focused journals, thus allowing African-based authors to publish in alternative journals. According to George (2007), ontological and epistemological issues featured heavily in the first two debates. From an epistemological view, the first debate was concerned with the ethical principles of idealism vs the protection of state interests. In contrast, in the second debate, the epistemological focus was on the model of approach to be used to gain knowledge. The question of values in a theory has been a central concern and continues to be so. For realists, state interests matter most in an anarchical world, while for idealists the role of institutions is key to maintaining international peace and security to enhance sustainable development.

The first two debates raised significant questions: who has the authority to define what is knowledge, and what is the basis for such a definition? These two debates served to marginalise Africa, as it was newly independent and lacked sufficient data. However, lessons from this exclusion have helped Africa determine its voice. They were not just mere academic debates; they reflected how intellectualism can be used to exclude a region where data was qualitative and often passed through oral means. The NAM and G77 therefore sought to address this gap by articulating an alternative voice that should become mainstream.

Challenging Western-centric knowledge in relation to the NAM and G77

For Pan-Africanism, one of the greatest challenges remains the tensions between the philosophy of the AU's call for unity and regional integration vis-à-vis national sovereignty. Despite these challenges, the region has kept the spirit of Pan-Africanism up, albeit symbolically. Africa has some of the best norms, including the Constitutive Act of the African Union, a peace and security architecture, and a solid foundation upon which regional integration has been established, among other norms. Despite the successes noted from the NAM and G77, the emergence of other partnerships such as FOCAC, the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) and others is likely to overstretch institutional capacity and will weaken the collective coherence of the region.

Perhaps Africa has appeared to be marginalised because of how much focus has been placed on the political crises that have occurred on the continent, as well as the conflicts and the globalisation and Africanisation of diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis and Ebola. However, the twenty-first century has seen Africa playing a critical role in the context of shaping the post-2015 agenda on sustainable development. The nexus between the NAM and G77 has enhanced the collective bargaining power of these countries to address issues such as the 'triple planetary threat' of climate change (United Nations 2021), biodiversity loss and pollution. Additionally, the NAM and G77, which hosted a meeting in 2024 in Kampala, Uganda, have been increasingly vocal in addressing an unequal

global governance system, the crisis of multilateralism and economic inequalities, which disproportionately affect African states. The NAM and G77 have a bigger role to play in addressing Africa's marginal contribution to global trade, estimated to be around 3 per cent, as noted by Pittet (2021), with a majority being raw materials, highlighting Africa's inability to add value to its raw products. Africa is also presenting common positions in major issues of international concern, including climate change funding for adaptation around the just transition, as was witnessed during the Climate Change Conference held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Other common positions include Africa's external debt, specifically on interest rates. African leaders have also championed reforms in the UN, with a specific focus on getting a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, as well as universal access to medicines, especially around HIV and, lately, on equitable access to vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). These common positions demonstrate an emerging policy shift in Africa, which sees competing intra-African interests shelved into a common position for the continent. Some of the common positions articulated by the AU on behalf of the African continent include the Ezulwini Consensus on UN Reforms of 2005, as underscored by the AU (2005), the common position on climate change (2023), the common African position on the post-2015 development agenda (2014), the common African position on the review of UN peace operations (2015), and the common African position on humanitarian effectiveness (2016).

These positions have all been established to bolster Africa's position in relation to IR in a fast-changing, globalised world. This shift demonstrates a reorientation of African agency from dependency to self-determination. Africa's success in rebuilding its agency from a non-aligned perspective and through the G77 is contingent upon a realignment of the global systems of governance that recognise Africa as a meaningful and key player in IR and not a fringe player only useful to legitimise the positions and needs of the rest of the world. Where IR theories have relegated the continent to the periphery, engagement through the NAM and G77 has demonstrated Africa's agency and reshaped IR.

Conclusion

Both the NAM and G77 have offered African scholars a platform to engage in solutions for the region based on a deep understanding of the challenges. Additionally, South–South cooperation continues to foster opportunities for countries to share experiences and promote alternative models of development based on a nuanced understanding of the geopolitical context. In the twenty-first century, Africa is no longer being viewed as a supplicant actor worldwide. It has emerged from that pessimism to exploit its position in the use of soft diplomacy in place of military might. The AU's diplomacy of solidarity has seen the continent stand up to the West, thus averting cases of economic sanctions and coercion, as was the case when African leaders refused to cooperate with the International Criminal Court to have Omar al-Bashir, then President of Sudan and subject to ICC arrest warrants for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, arrested. These complexities of the binaries shape how other actors locate Africa in relation to how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South.

The deployment of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the agreement to deploy the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and the deployment of Southern African Development Community (SADC) forces in eastern DRC are some of the efforts that the AU has made to address peace and security. As noted by Brown (2012), Africa's move to appoint a high-level panel to negotiate peace in Libya, led by Mauritania, whilst criticising the UN for sanctioning the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mission, demonstrates the AU's stance on solidarity and African agency. Since the turn of the millennium, Africa has gained more importance as a key player in IR. According to Lingying (2013), an emerging multipolar system has thrust Africa into the centre of an emerging dynamism in IR, as regions such as China and the BRICS axis – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (the original members, with new members Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Ethiopia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia incorporated in 2024) – joined mainstream

IR, thus opening the space for other regions to exert their presence. The emergence of more partners means that African agency can be better exploited without undue pressure from one partner. In addition to state-led agencies, individuals such as Nelson Mandela and Mo Ibrahim have been forceful in articulating African agency.

From raising significant points around poverty to issues of justice and good and democratic governance, these actors have helped complement African agency while maintaining a non-aligned stance. In Kenya, celebrated environmentalist and Nobel Prize winner Wangari Maathai is remembered for linking environmental conservation to human rights and justice, raising the profile of a matter of global concern. African agency, constructed around the NAM and G77, defines Africa as a major player in IR. Whilst Africa has been seen as an absent player and one that is only describable from a perspective of civil wars, poverty, illicit capital flow and globalised diseases, Africa is emerging as an alternative player in key issues of global concern in the twenty-first century. Indeed, theorising African agency through the NAM and G77 indicates that it is nearly impossible to address emergent matters of international concern without meaningfully involving Africa as an equal partner in IR.

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CHAPTER 6

Africa and India in the Global South: Leveraging Technological Innovations

Peter Mbuva Kathukya
University of Nairobi, Kenya

Introduction

Studies on African descent show that W. E. B. Du Bois of the United States and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana were central in the establishment of the global coalitions of the NAM at the Belgrade Conference of 1961 and the G77 during the first UN Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva in 1964. These formations evidenced an embracing of Pan-Africanism and Afro-Asian solidarity (Assié-Lumumba 2015). The Second World War amplified the quest for an alternative to the dominant 'bipolar system' in the sustenance of peace. The Africans and Asians joined forces strategically to break the 'yoke' of colonialism and imperialism. This suggested that non-alignment emerged as a foreign policy position among many countries in the developing world, especially Africa during the post-Cold War era.

Africa in the twenty-first century attracted external interests from new players, the most significant being Gulf states such as the United Arab Emirates. Certainly, such advances signalled that African states needed more political, economic and diplomatic options for balancing the influence and power of the West. From the outset, Africa engaged in forming NAM to advance and project its interests in world affairs. Africa established the G77 group of countries within the larger United Nations (UN) to approach shared problems through reciprocal solidarity. Through the NAM and G77, the South–South alliance pushed for major reforms in global governance, and new international economic orders. Nonetheless,

the changing world order contributed to increased dependency on alliances created to advance and protect the interests of countries globally. Africa's current history of being exploited, victimised, marginalised and silenced is what placed it at the periphery of global politics. Intensified globalisation is also to blame for increased exploitation, downgrading and isolation of Africa's people from spheres of development. New partnerships should move beyond resource nationalism and instead embrace an exchange of 'resources-for-technology', with major powers like India and China, to reduce over-dependency.

Go's (2020) analysis of the metropole–colony relationship indicates that Africa's contemporary history of marginalisation, exploitation, victimisation and being silenced explains its position at the periphery of global politics. The colonial past is behind the continent's portrayal as an impassive and minor player with regard to the changes in global politics (Mabera 2019). Africa's agency is exemplified by its fight for political and economic independence in the post-World War period. African agency is considered by African leaders as the key to the execution of policies in diverse areas of governance, regionalism/regional integration, security, migration, health and the environment. However, studies of African agency have historically been framed within mainstream IR, rather than within the more recent global IR approach, partly because scholars differ on how they define and interpret 'agency' (Acharya 2016). Numerous scholars critique conventional approaches to the chapter and practice of international politics, citing the fundamental problem of the discipline to be its lack of inclusivity of Global South perspectives. In seeking to elucidate why some countries adopt opposing ideologies, this chapter argues that a country's stance is dependent on findings from other scholars, due to their significance on institutional factors such as democracy, economic openness and left–right positioning. Africa's philosophy has roots in political and socio-economic development and emanates from reactions to colonial and neo-colonial experience. This study is anchored in dependency theory because of its advocacy for collective, self-reliant and self-sustaining economic development in Africa. Nevertheless, practically, these aspirations have not produced the intended outcomes, a gap that this study seeks to explain through English

School theory. Africa can leverage the Pan-Africanism philosophy, which is an intellectual movement that calls for African countries to unite for freedom and prosperity. Alliances have been instrumental in amplifying Africa's voice and projecting African values and diplomacy to reflect the continent's concerns at the global level. These enable Africa to navigate through the complexities of the binaries on how other actors perceive the location of Africa in relation to how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South.

Ontologically, African community beliefs and value systems emphasise the supremacy of the community within which the individual exists. Conversely, African belief and value systems naturally allow the individual and the community to be interdependent. However, this does not reduce the ontological density or the primacy of the community. The African context of epistemology is that an individual does not have enough capacity to acquire knowledge alone; they do so within a social context (Ani 2013). In relation to the power dimension, this chapter explores Africa and India as emerging major powers in the world. As Africa's strategic importance increases, India has leveraged the global trust deficit in Africa [?] and is now the trusted mouthpiece on Global South affairs. India leveraged its economic muscle and political influence in increasing the Global South's voice. India's avoidance of great-power rivalry and pursuing of an independent path resonated with the African states, who suffered under the West's dominance and double standards on matters of debt, climate, sanctions and war. The African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) need to overcome shared challenges with a view to finding a common voice in the global sphere.

The NAM and G77 are the second-largest groupings after the UN, and Uganda's assumption of the chairmanship offers a great opportunity. Africa stands to gain from the following strategies: leveraging advancing science and technology to improve its manufacturing; addressing the current problems facing the globe, such as environment, crime and terrorism; strengthening the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for strategic business; reinforcing of the NAM and G77 to influence decisions at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC); and, lastly, building consensus and priorities favourable to the developing

nations by maintaining unity, solidarity and collective coordination of all Member States. Since the formation of the NAM and G77 through declarations made by 77 countries, membership has grown to encompass 134 countries in the Global South (Makubalo et al. 2020). The AU actively used the NAM and G77 to make resolutions and create influence on all AU interests during negotiations at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the UNSC. Specifically, an 'alliance' of the AU, NAM and G77 is critical in handling core development matters such as the application of technology in agriculture; championing environmental sustainability and the UN's New International Economic Order; and passing resolutions that liberate Africa from colonisation (Zang 1998).

This chapter covers Africa in the larger Global South, before narrowing down to India to examine the technological opportunities that Africa could leverage in its quest to amplify its voice in the NAM and G77+China. This chapter proposes the need for African countries to adopt a 'united developmental ideological agenda' capable of speaking to their resources, including minerals and socio-economic development, in order to attain equal footing on international standing and ensure its voice is heard within the NAM and G77.

Background

Africa is undergoing profound transformations that have impacted on the lives of millions of people on the continent. Demographic growth, urbanisation, migration, technological development, digitalisation and structural economic and globalisation changes remain the most striking issues facing the continent in the 2020s, and likely extending into the 2030s. These changes depict an unpredictable world that demands the building of resilience for the planet's future. On the face of it, Africa's resilience is entirely dependent on its countries' capacity to harness innovation, as well as to create innovative development systems. Over the decades, the functionality of innovation systems has proved to be the foremost booster of economic growth and stimulus for employment creation in the Global North countries, including those in North America, Europe and some others in East Asia and Oceania.

Thus, the Global South, comprising Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and developing Asia, must put innovation systems at the forefront of its development strategies. Nevertheless, Schillo and Robinson (2017) contend that innovations potentially contributed to socio-economic inequalities. Nouck (2021) argues that China–India partnerships with Africa increased the likelihood of military clashes over resources – an issue that cannot be totally wished away. Chen (2018) summarised these by making three reflections: in the first scenario, natural resources come from foreign countries and the two trading countries have no direct influence nor overarching authority to completely prevent the other from accessing the resources; in the second scenario, the partnerships employ both smart and soft power in securing access to Africa's natural resources, and despite unequal capabilities and competition, cooperation proves to be inexpensive; and in the third scenario, awareness of the scarcity of resources, due in large part to the effects of globalisation and limited capacity to attain the best ecosystem globally. Pant (2020) argued that India's economy in the last three decades expanded exponentially due to the availability of nuclear power technology and a huge population driving labour demands. Conversely, the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, coupled with technological progression, lead to tremendous interest and leveraging of artificial intelligence (AI). Consequently, Global South countries are now capitalising on the opportunities presented to them by the rise of AI technologies, contrary to the earlier development of AI, which was entirely Western-oriented (Okolo 2023).

Historically, the 1955 Bandung Conference ultimately informed the evolution of South–South cooperation. This cooperation was aimed mainly at challenging the 'Norths' dominance over economic and political 'systems', however, the successes have not been without obstacles. This is imperatively because the conference contributed to the newly decolonised countries in the "global South" emphasising cultural and economic cooperation, human rights and fostering of global peace' (Appadorai 1955). According to Braveboy-Wagner et al. (2009), the emergence of 'Third World' solidarity defied the dominant colonial relationship thereby encouraging greater political, economic and diplomatic cooperation among Global South nations. The Bandung Conference also captured

policies of non-interference and non-alignment, and the NAM established solidarity strategically to challenge the deepening world inequality and reduce political and economic dependence on the developed economies in the Global North.

The perpetual ties between India and Africa are traceable back to 1900 when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi actively campaigned against colonial rule in Africa in his advocacy for fairness and equality. Gandhi asserted that 'trade between India and Africa comprised of ideas and services contrasting with Western colonial model, which emphasised on the exchange of finished goods for raw materials' (Mathews 1997). In comparison, the twenty-first century shows a turn of the 'story', as India–Africa relations move beyond 'ideas and services' to more pragmatic relations that are now focused on India's economic, political and security interests as well as responses to Africa's developmental needs. Currently, India offers not only a feasible model of economic growth that is acceptable across the developing world but has also become a role model for democratic consolidation and sustainability, which is a rare occurrence in the majority of postcolonial states (Varshney 2013).

India and Africa's historical, economic, political and cultural linkages are well known. India's role in fighting colonialism, neo-colonialism as well as apartheid is credited for strengthening these pledges. Over the past few decades, India and Africa experienced considerable economic developments that were amalgamated within the context of South–South cooperation (Chaturvedi et al. 2014). Again, India played a crucial role in the establishing of the NAM, the G77 and the UN system. Furthermore, the establishment of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964, followed by the adoption of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974, reflects these aspirations. A further review of India's foreign policy towards Africa shows it has been fruitful. However, some analysts point out that, despite Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi actively linking foreign policy to national economic plans, there has also been a 'lack of strategic approach to Africa', a matter that means India loses out on certain key economic opportunities whilst relinquishing the space to rival countries such as China (Trigunayat 2019).

Studies depict significant changes to the economic relationship between India and Africa, with bilateral trade having increased from approximately US$5,5 billion in 2001–2002 to around US$70 billion (about US$220 per person in the US) in 2018–2019. However, the period 2014–2015 saw a peak of approximately US$72 billion in trade. The increase in trade was activated by the designing and developing of policies such as the Focus Africa programme initiated by the Indian government in 2002. This programme focused on improving trade and investment relations with the African continent. The India–Africa Summit initiative, launched in 2008, also created an avenue for Duty-Free Tariff Preferences (DFTP) for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which played an instrumental role in boosting bilateral trade. Since then, the scheme has grown to account for 98 per cent of India's tariff lines and is presently active in more than 38 African nations which are direct beneficiaries of the DFTP scheme. Nevertheless, the tremendous growth in trade has been highly concentrated on a finite number of products and services, as roughly three quarters of Africa's exports to India are in the form of primary commodities and natural resources. Correspondingly, India's exports of pharmaceuticals and refined petroleum products to Africa account for 40 per cent (Afreximbank 2018). India's exports to Africa increased exponentially, with West Africa becoming the largest recipient and the region's exports falling significantly, by US$4,45 billion. The same trend was witnessed in 2023–2024, with India's exports increasing within the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and the East African Community (EAC) countries (Biswas 2024).

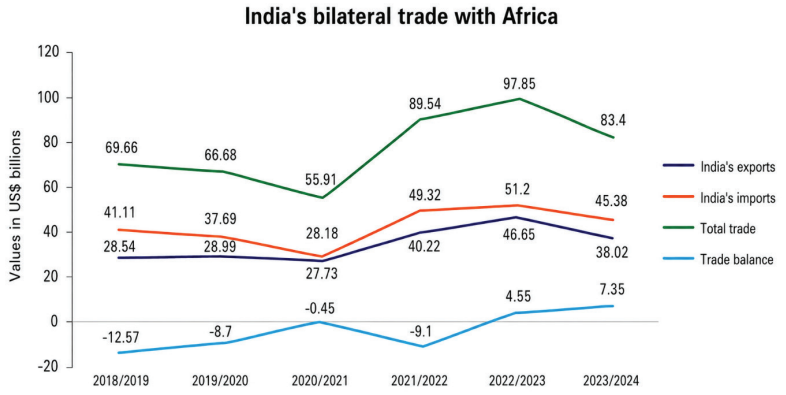


Figure 6.1: India's bilateral trade with Africa (2018–2024). Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

Against this backdrop, this study broadly focuses on examining how Africa and India can use technological innovations to leverage optimally on each other within the Global South. This chapter seeks to provide answers to the following specific questions: how do trade and investment linkages influence India–Africa relations in the Global South? In what ways do the BRICS impact India–Africa collaboration in the Global South? What aspects of technological innovations promote peace, security and development between India and Africa? What are the mainstream areas of technological transfer between Africa and India? What are some of the shared opportunities and challenges for Africa and India? What specific strategies can Africa employ to leverage India's technological advancement? This chapter also offers comprehensive recommendations.

Theoretical Foundation

This chapter adopts Bull's English School theory (Bull 1977) because of its potential to examine African agency through the lenses of the international system, international society and world society. The choice of the theory is due to its capacity to champion Africa's agency through strengthening institutions. This study finds the theory as being

suitable to examine India and Africa in the Global South because of its underpinning of collaboration, which is anchored on the liberal tenet of cooperation, thus allowing the duo to enter into mutual agreement on matters of technological exchange, trade and investment, climate change, peace, security and development. The theory's emphasis on the absence of a world government also helps explain why India and Africa seek to collaborate in order to leverage technological power and amplify their voices. This theory suits the debate because the creation of a 'world society' is aided by having a better understanding of each other's diverse cultures, particularly when they are to leverage from each other.

Research Design

This chapter employs secondary sources of data that include desktop reviews of existing literature from journals, articles and e-books. The chapter also uses authentic search engines.

Trade and investment linkages between India and Africa

Bhagwati and Srinivasan (2002), examining the impact of free trade on poverty in relation to the availability of resources and technology, claimed that, from a static point of view, having plentiful resources was likely to increase income in a country through opening that country up to trade. Nevertheless, by considering the abundant factor in the developing nations, Stopler-Samuelson's (1941) theorem of 'unskilled labour' contends that unskilled labour has greater opportunity to gain from 'trade openness' among developing countries (Abizadeh and Tosun 2007). On the contrary, Krueger (1984) suggests that any significant trade reforms among developing countries must be pro-poor, as this increases a country's likelihood of gaining comparative advantage through producing goods that require unskilled labour. Conversely, in order for comparative advantage to increase the earnings of the unskilled workers, they need to have the capacity to change from contracting sectors to more expansionary ones. Even so, cross-country regression studies on economic growth have produced mixed evidence. Relying either on trade

shares or guides on trade freedoms, Sachs and Warner (1995) note there is a positive correlation between growth and trade liberalisation. The African continent, with more than a quarter of UN member countries, has a significant voice in global trade. Arguably, the continent's growing geopolitical importance places it squarely within India's trade-promotion priorities. This has the implication that Africa's oil and mineral resources are significantly important both to the rapidly expanding Indian economy and for developing Africa's consumer and capital markets. According to Desai (2010), having a huge Indian diaspora on the African continent manifests the significance of foreign policy in enhancing trade between India and Africa.

Dramatic trends in South–South economic relationships are also manifesting transformations from the conventional patterns of economic development. This is predominantly evident in Asia–Africa trade and investment flows. Broadman (2006) points out that these economic associations contributed to both actual opportunities and challenges for African countries. On the other hand, a more careful diagnosis of Africa's relations with India and China indicates that the opportunities stimulated by both countries on trade and investment in Africa do not necessarily lead to improved growth and reduction of poverty in Africa. Moreover, the chapter notes that the quantity of trade and investment flows is not the main determinant; growth is better judged by the quality of the greater commercial relationships and how they influence these flows. Currently, India is Africa's third-largest trade partner, after the European Union (EU) and China. The largest export categories to Africa include finished petroleum and pharmaceutical products, cars and car parts, electrical and industrial machinery, whilst the largest share of India's imports from Africa is mainly raw materials, such as crude oil from Nigeria. Conversely, India has a large coal reserve, but it is a net importer of gas and oil – a situation that forced it to explore external markets with the express purpose of securing the energy it needs for sustainable domestic growth.

Simultaneously, there have been significant trade flows between Asia and Africa, which is a major boost to the continents' trade performance. Specifically, this growth is largely driven by economic complementarities between the two regions. Africa has increased its demand for Asia's

finished products and machinery, while Asia's demand for Africa's natural resources is rapidly increasing, particularly for labour-intensive products. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII 2018) report *India–Africa and Investment* showed that mutual trade between the two regions increased remarkably – from US$7,2 billion (about US$22 per person in the US) in 2001 to US$62 billion (about US$190 per person in the US) in 2018, which is a demonstration of considerable growth within a relatively short period. One of the cited reasons for such growth has been Indian lines of credit, which have been extended to African countries largely through the Export-Import Bank of India (EXIM Bank), the institution that finances numerous infrastructural projects across Africa. A similar report by India's Ministry of External Affairs, titled *Lines of Credit to African Countries in 2019*, illustrated some examples of projects, including the Kampala–Entebbe Expressway in Uganda, Construction of the National Assembly building in Gambia, and the construction of the Mahatma Gandhi International Convention Center in Niger (Kharwal 2023).

The impact of BRICS on India-Africa collaboration in the Global South

BRICS represents the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The term BRIC was originally coined by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill in his 2001 report titled *Building Better Global Economic BRICs* (Khanduri 2025). BRICS is an informal intergovernmental grouping whose strategic cooperation is based on individual economic and geopolitical strategies. Marc and Falkenberg (2024) observes that, besides having increased economic power, BRICS has now expanded to include countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Egypt. The inclusion of two additional African states in BRICS has heightened expectations about the continent's potential role in the evolving global order (Khumalo 2023). Cheru (2020) perceives the emergence of BRICS, as well as other emerging economies such as India, as being more of an opportunity for the African continent than a threat. He argues that the rise of such powers presents new opportunities for the African countries to gain greater autonomy over their development and gain independent economic policies that are free

of the conditionalities originally linked to aid from Western donors.

India and Africa play a critical role in influencing BRICS dynamics, particularly in advancing the agenda of a more inclusive world order. India, as the world's largest democracy and a major emerging economy, prioritises geopolitical strategic positioning and a shared commitment with African countries to transforming major institutions such as the UNSC. India's engagement in BRICS manifests its desire for global leadership and its means for navigating the complexities of the existing power dynamics (Kamalakar 2024). Alden and Aran (2017) argue that South Africa's entry into BRICS as the first African country added a continental dimension which remains significant in addressing issues such as sustainable development, poverty reduction and the enhancement of investment and trade flows. This partnership has contributed to increased collaboration on infrastructure development, renewable energy and education between India and Africa, and it has underscored the broader South–South cooperation within BRICS, which pushes for a multipolar world order that defies Western-power dominance. However, Monyae and Ndzendze (2021) argue that BRICS acted as a competitor to the existing international order and regional systems. On the contrary, India's huge political interest in Africa depicts competition with China in accessing African markets as well as natural resources for feeding its energy-security sector and expanding its diplomatic impact for promotion of cooperation towards development (Cheru and Obi 2011). With an estimated 1,4 billion people, Africa boasts of increased spending levels that make it potentially profitable and attractive for foreign direct investment and exports of finished products (Cheru and Obi 2011: 92). The BRICS expansion to include extra African countries could disadvantage South Africa over countries with larger economies such as China and India due to diverse interests – and because the most powerful countries stand to expand their influence over the rest. Arapova and Lissovolik (2022) argue that, although BRICS expansion opens opportunities for BRICS members, economic and financial sanctions imposed by Western powers may diminish BRICS's capacity to be the voice of the Global South nations.

Peace, security and technology aspects between India and Africa

Studies reveal a substantial gap in the research on correlation between innovative technologies and their role in fostering development among countries (Wang et al. 2023). India has actively cultivated closer relations with African states in the spheres of defence and security. The global security environment is rapidly changing with the rise of new security threats such as transnational organised crime and 'blue crimes' such as piracy, illegal fishing and smuggling. Battling such security threats demands collaborative efforts between India and African countries (Mishra 2023).

The emergence of technologies provides new opportunities in the areas of peace, security and development, particularly in peace operations, peacebuilding and the prevention of conflicts. The use of new technologies played a significant role in collecting intelligent information on crimes, creating early warning systems and response mechanisms (Uwa and Ronke 2023). Conspicuously, deployment of peacekeepers occurs in highly dangerous and challenging environments and, consequently, the majority of peacekeepers are often susceptible due to being under-equipped, pointing to significant gaps in relation to equipment and training. The Brahimi report (United Nations 2000) suggests that peacekeeping missions are likely to benefit hugely from the use of technological innovations. India's launch of the technological platform dubbed 'UNITE AWARE', in collaboration with the UN, is instrumental in providing intelligent information to peacekeepers in remote areas and in ensuring their safety and security (Nzioki 2020). The same is echoed in the UN Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation Report *Performance Peacekeeping* (United Nations, 2015), which argues that peacekeeping must be supported technologically to meet the current complexities and successfully lead to peace (Bratt 1997). Certainly, while other parts of the world, such as Asia, Europe and North America were embracing the Fourth Industrial Revolution, other regions in the African continent were playing a catch-up game, and with a glaring digital divide. This is happening despite Africa showing the largest internet consumption. Nevertheless, relying on 2017 data, the rate of penetration

within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is higher (by approximately 26 percentage points than the continental average. Notably, the majority of emerging economies in Africa are still dependent on agriculture and extraction of natural resources and have not positioned themselves as major investment destinations for new technologies (Gillwald and Mothobi 2019). The diffusion of technology in LDCs such as Zambia depicts numerous challenges of uneven distribution and penetration (Kala 2023).

Tellidis (2020) contends that technological supremacy has been a key determinant in any matter of warfare and is thus an important factor when it comes to peace and war, since it serves as a mechanism for instilling discipline and control. Consequently, modern technologies offer opportunities for mutual cooperation on a global basis. The Independent Commission on Multilateralism (2017) contends that new technologies play a crucial role in supporting and promoting sustainable peace, security and development, and, as a result, it has gained acceptance within the UN. African countries have made tremendous progress in developing their technologies geared towards meeting their sustainable development challenges. However, India's experimentation with modern technologies for development places it in a position where African countries can benefit greatly by drawing lessons from its experiences (Bajpai et al. 2021). For instance, technological advancements in image-processing capabilities, satellite imaging as well as surveillance technologies remain critical tools that the UN stands to benefit from in its agenda for peace and security. In particular, during the UN mission in Sudan authorised under UNSC Resolution 1706 (2006), the UN employed 'aerial reconnaissance' and other 'aerial' means to help safeguard and protect civilians (UN Security Council 2006). Similarly, the UN deployed drones to support the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons in Chad in 2009.

India's security engagement with Africa has centred on three main areas: intensified participation in UN peacekeeping operations in protracted African conflict zones; cooperation on counter-terrorism and maritime security; and military collaboration through training initiatives. Between 2014 and 2015, India accounted for 80 per cent of the police officers (male and female) deployed as UN peacekeepers ('blue helmets')

across the African continent (Mukherjee 2015). Historically, India maintained only limited military-to-military relations with African states during the apartheid era in South Africa. More recently, however, India has demonstrated a clear commitment to supporting Sahel governments through funding and training aimed at combating violent extremism. As African economies undergo significant transitions, they warrant a far greater share of India's strategic attention.

Compared to India, Africa is less dependent on resources, with manufacturing being at the core of the growth in African economies. India's private sector, coupled with its rich human resource pool, stands to benefit from the African countries currently undergoing transitions in their economies – mostly those from East and Southern Africa, such as South Africa, Kenya and Mozambique, and West African states like Ghana (Passi and Guennoun 2018). Despite India's continued engagement with the African continent, the relationship has yielded little achievement. However, Prime Minister Modi's 2018 articulation of 'Ten Guiding Principles for India–Africa Engagement' helped reinvigorate relations with several African countries, with a particular emphasis on technology, industry, security, intelligence cooperation and financial inclusion. Tirziu (2021) argues that India's ties with Zambia were centred on defence cooperation and anti-terrorism. In this case, India considers the fight against terrorism a common fight destined to create a fairer representation of developing countries in international organisations.

The mainstream areas for technological transfer between Africa and India

Developing nations in Southeast Asia became the first to show the impact of technology on agricultural yields. Pingali and Abraham (2022) argue that Asia's transformation from a food-deficient continent to a self-sufficient one, and its attaining of exporter status, is an important example. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the Green Revolution is widely recognised as having ushered in a monumental shift in eliminating famine in Asia. To be precise, between 1900 and 1969, famine claimed more than 80,3 million lives, whereas between 1970 and 2016 the

mortality rate resulting from lack of food reduced to 9,2 million. Evenson and Gollin (2003) argue that crop-breeding innovations were instrumental in reducing food insecurity globally over the past 100 years. The Green Revolution introduced high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of major grains such as rice, wheat and maize, alongside mechanisation and increased use of fertilisers and other inputs. Together, these innovations helped build more resilient food systems capable of supporting rapidly growing populations in parts of Asia and Latin America (Pingali 2012). Consequently, the higher yields contributed to increased food availability, reductions in prices and improved household incomes, and to a large extent contributed to a reduction in hunger and poverty in developing nations (Eicher and Staatz 1998). According to Balogun (2022), subsistence farming – which accounts for a third of the world's food – continued to face challenges of limited land for farming due to population pressure, and price and income volatility due to changes in agricultural policies, poverty, climate change, complex food systems and biophysical challenges such as disease and pest outbreaks, soil infertility and land degradation.

India today joins the league of large-scale purchasers of African farmland, and is criticised for 'land grabbing' alongside countries such as Kuwait, China, Saudi Arabia and South Korea, who are all investing heavily in agricultural production in Africa. Declining groundwater levels and India's long-term strategic concerns have encouraged the country to invest in agricultural production abroad, particularly in parts of Africa, as one component of its broader food-security strategy. Conversely, developing nations are strategically courting Indian agricultural investors through special incentives such as huge tracts of arable land at relatively cheaper cost. At the same time, the Indian government is continuously supporting this trend through trade diplomacy, foreign assistance and the issuing of subsidised credits to its external agricultural producers (Rowden 2011). However, this trend has been criticised for negative effects on local communities, including the internally displaced persons (De Schutter 2011). For instance, the disclosure of lease contracts between the Ethiopian Government and five Indian companies demonstrates some of the political, ethical, environmental and human rights ramifications

for local communities in host countries (Girmay and Nekemet 2021). Some of the agricultural technology adopted in African countries has included uses in farming of cocoa in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, flowers in Ethiopia and Kenya, and cassava farming in Nigeria. Rawat (2020) associates the lack of adoption of new agricultural technologies in many African countries to low investment in research and development compared to South Asia. Gulati and Das (2020) trace India–Africa agricultural cooperation through initiatives such as training programmes and concessional credit, particularly in areas like mechanised farming, soil-quality testing, irrigation and conservation.

There is also a growing emphasis on climate-smart agriculture (CSA) in Asia, driven in part by increased financing from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Comparable efforts in East and Southern Africa are being advanced through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which aims to reach 25 million households with CSA practices by 2025 (Aggarwal et al. 2017). The use of CSA boosts sustainability of agricultural productivity by creating adaptation and resilience, lowering and eliminating emission of greenhouse gases, contributing to food security, and the realisation of national development goals (Palombi and Sessa 2013). On the other hand, agricultural digitalisation enhances productivity, efficiency, food security and sustainability through soil protection, conserving of biodiversity, and human health (Macpherson et al. 2022).

Digitalisation leverages the Internet of Things (IoT), drones, sensors, robotics, cloud computing, AI, decision-support software (DSS), information and communication technologies (ICT) and block chain to enhance agricultural production and value-chain processes within food systems (Klerkx 2021). In addition, mobile-based initiatives such as SMS services and mobile applications are being promoted in many countries by governments, NGOs and private-sector actors, working either individually or in partnership (Sentilkumar 2013). Classical examples include India's Digital Green, Ghana's Esoko and Uganda's AgriNet, all of which provide digital solutions to farmers through good-agricultural-practice advisories, market-linkage information and weather forecasts (Nyarko and Kozári 2021). Thus, digitalisation of agriculture has encouraged a

revolution that has the potential to respond to the increasing needs of the growing population based on the prevailing economic and environmental challenges (Trendov et al. 2019).

Indeed, improving productivity, sustainability and profitability of the agri-food system in Africa is critical to the region's economic development, food security and nutrition. Agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa makes up approximately 15 per cent of GDP, with evidence indicating that a 1 per cent increase in GDP potentially reduces poverty by more than 1 per cent on average. Similarly, a 1 per cent increase in industry or services GDP is associated with a reduction in poverty levels of just over 0,5 per cent (Kim and Shah et al. 2020). Africa needs to leverage India's technological tools to become more productive and efficient, and to build resilience within its agri-food systems. Through the adoption of disruptive agricultural technologies (DATs), African countries can lower the costs emanating from linkages between buyers and sellers, thus reducing difficulties in accessing information, technologies and markets. This could also aid farmers in quick decision-making on resource mobilisation and management through the provision, processing and analysing of data quickly. It could also reduce economies of scale. Regarding Uganda, New Delhi is aiming at investing in energy infrastructure and agricultural technology. In the actual sense, India adopted a diversified approach towards Africa, and today it is more trusted than China across industries (Cheru and Obi 2010). Conversely, India is dependent on African states for its economic development, and for its global and regional ambitions. More evidently, Africa and India exchanges on technological matters (tech hubs) enhance greater African agency and boost African start-ups through integrated learning and investments. Perhaps this is an opportunity for creating markets for India's tech products and services.

Technological exchange in the healthcare sector

Passi and Guennoun (2018) maintain that Africa and India share numerous commonalities that go beyond socio-demographic profiles to also capture healthcare challenges. While the African continent comprises independent nation-states, India consists of a federated union of states.

Markedly, both India and Africa have experienced increased adoption of digital health platforms. However, India's continuous concerted effort, particularly around innovating its healthcare, has gained recognition worldwide. Future Health Index Report (2019) published by Royal Philips show that India achieved global leader status in health technology, and is thus regarded as one of the leading countries in terms of adoption of digital health technology, as 76 per cent of India's healthcare professionals are currently using digital health records (DHRs) in their work (Mathur and Philips 2019).

In comparison, the embracing of technology in the delivery of healthcare services in most African countries is still at the initiation stages. While some countries, such as South Africa, Kenya and Rwanda, were adopting digital technologies, the majority were still lagging. Mechael and Edelman (2019) suggest that Africa lags in the global average of attaining maturity. This insinuates a desire for the African countries to design and implement sustainable interventions geared towards meeting citizens' healthcare needs. Evidently, India and Africa share commonalities on healthcare challenges, and Africa can learn from India's affordable healthcare interventions. In this case, Africa has the potential of leveraging on technology to strengthen its healthcare systems infrastructure through learning and applying the successful Indian technologies.

Chataway et al. (2009) argue that science, technology and innovation are crucial for alleviating poverty and improving health. Indeed, enhancing access to quality healthcare together with existing health technologies is indispensable. However, the importing of technologies and products does not guarantee sustainable healthcare systems. Moreover, nations are required to build their own capacities and institutions that support innovations tailored to citizens' needs. Conversely, the challenge of having advanced technology and innovation is contingent on the policy-maker's capacity to deal with issues systematically and build innovative systems that facilitate, foster and respond to developments. Accordingly, an article in *Nature Biotechnology* made a compelling case for building innovative health systems among developing countries, arguing that this is crucial for building health systems that reflect the needs of the developing nations (Thorsteinsdottir et al. 2004). Certainly, manufacturing and innovative

capacity among countries such as India, Brazil, Cuba, South Africa, China and South Korea have contributed significantly to increased research and product development for diseases affecting Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Relatedly, telemedicine initiatives represent a key health-ICT intervention from which sub-Saharan Africa can learn. Both regions face acute shortages of medical specialists – such as cardiologists, radiologists, paediatricians and oncopathologists – largely because these experts are concentrated in urban centres, leaving rural areas underserved. In India, for example, around 68 per cent of the population lives in rural areas that experience severe shortages of qualified doctors and healthcare professionals (Mathur 2017). In comparison, sub-Saharan Africa has an average of not more than 10 doctors per population of 100 000 people, with 14 countries lacking radiologists, according to Fraser (2000). Telemedicine is a critical component that can help India and Africa increase accessibility in remote areas. Conversely, the African continent's significance has grown in the world energy markets as a result of West Asia's instability. Consequently, technological advances have created an avenue for extracting Africa's offshore oil reserves and making the continent the most favoured destination for the majority of Indian companies. Mohanty and Chaturvedi (2008) point out that the establishment of the Group of Twenty (G20) marked the climax of South African and Indian efforts towards strengthening their relations ever since the World Trade Organization's (WTO's) Seattle meeting in 1999.

Africa, like other continents, has embraced the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution. A good example is the use of drones in healthcare, particularly in delivering blood in remote areas, as is happening in Rwanda. This provides a large contribution to the security of its citizens. Other Africa countries are engaging in technological research and development, with Ethiopia and Nigeria thriving with regard to AI hubs (Razakamaharavo 2021). As India continues to advance its capacities in technologies such as satellite communications and AI, this creates strong opportunities for partnering with African countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda, Nigeria and South Africa, who have already launched satellites into the skies, and also with other African countries currently lacking such

technologies. These developments have the potential to attract the US as an ally of India and African countries in the race for space technology – an area in which China is also keen on advancing its presence.

Opportunities for both Africa and India in the Global South

Some African countries, such as Namibia and Niger, who are both signatories to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) since 1992 possess important uranium reserves, which present opportunities for India's strategic interests in resource and energy security partnerships (Ramachandran 2008). In this case, India's interests in Africa are not merely related to oil and gas, but the availability of minerals such as uranium. According to Pham (2007), India's strategy is centred on the pursuit of resources, trade opportunities, diplomatic initiatives and strategic partnerships. Plausibly, these factors explain the rising investments, trade and development aid partnerships that India is crafting with African countries. Madan (2006) estimates that by 2030 India will be the world's third-largest consumer of energy, overtaking Russia and Japan. Currently, India's oil needs account for 75 per cent of its energy supply requirements, with its dependence on oil projected to go above 90 per cent by 2020. Undeniably, Africa–South cooperation is significant in designing strategies for addressing the rising socio-economic challenges Africa faces. Such cooperation offers an opportunity for African countries to create technological change, transformation in their economies, and a foundation for sustainable growth.

According to Ferdowsi (2010), Africa's involvement in South–South collaboration offers an opportunity to increase not only its representation in the globe's economic and political arena but also augments its share of the international economy. Shared concerns are conspicuous in the areas of good governance, debt management and environmental sustainability on the continent. Additionally, Africa's attainment of long-term impact greatly depends on its capacity to exploit the full benefits of cooperation and diminish potential risks. Nonetheless, the realisation of a long-term development framework 'Vision 2030' holds a huge promise for Africa–India relations, since both countries value the

mutual benefits emanating from having deeper economic collaboration. Clearly, a strong Indian economy and stronger emerging markets across Africa offer substantial trade and investment opportunities. Africa's Agenda 2063 and India's Act East policy also exhibit important areas of convergence, making their partnership geopolitically significant. Equally, the country and the continent standing together offers a better chance of influencing governance at global level, including peacekeeping and climate change negotiations. The *African Trade Report* (2018) argues that the establishment of the AfCFTA places the continent in a strategic position, because it is now a vehicle for improving trade and helping in the transformation of African economies by ensuring value addition and reducing dependence on external commodities. The AfCFTA represents a significant opportunity for boosting Africa's development. Zucca (2023) argues that the AU's Agenda 2063 has the potential to accelerate intra-African trade, increasing the continents' trading position in the global market by reinforcing Africa's shared voice and policy space in international business negotiations.

India has been instrumental in taking bold steps towards strengthening its research and development through the development of innovative technologies and by changing its people's mindset towards utilising modern technology. There are now a large number of scientists and engineers working in research and development who are making India the 'hub of innovation', as the country has inculcated innovation in higher learning, thereby creating sustainable human capital. India, which is home to more than 100 multinational corporations, has consistently deepened its technological innovation capabilities, and it is now forming alliances with international corporations that are destined to reap numerous benefits due to linkages among local companies, universities and multinationals worldwide (Dahlman and Utz 2005).

Challenges facing India and Africa in the Global South

India has just 0,4 per cent of the world's oil reserves and, with only insignificant oil discoveries since the 1970s, it leads the list of countries that depend on imports of oil commodities. Conversely, Africa's weak

capacity prevented it from exerting meaningful influence in the economic world order despite its leaders' desire for increased negotiating power in international spaces. Another striking challenge in achieving India–Africa collaboration on infrastructural development has been inadequate funding and timely implementation of projects. Evidence from both Africa and India shows that numerous projects face delays and cost overruns (Gurara et al. 2018). Also, there is a lack of long-term maintenance and quality assurance, which often creates inefficiencies and shortens the project's lifespan (Kharwal 2023). A different study focusing on the digital divide and development in sub-Saharan Africa found a challenge in establishing whether the digital divide was expanding or narrowing down, but noted tremendous progress on infrastructure development and mobile connectivity, which could lead to bridging of the digital divide (Mutula 2008). Moreover, an analysis of the digital divide in India shows ICT infrastructure as the backbone and enabler of change and reform, as it attracted minimal resistance, with Singh (2010) suggesting that good governance only thrives where there is better ICT. However, despite India investing in ICT infrastructure to transform all its diverse cultural divides, Guillen (2006) argues that India remains the country in the developing world experiencing the greatest digital divide between rural and urban residents. Therefore, this problem demands to be understood through the lenses of mobile-phone penetration, tele density and internet access, which together shape the rural–urban digital divide in India.

Best practices as opportunities for addressing Africa's technological gaps

Africa needs to diversify trade beyond conventional sectors for it to promote balanced and sustainable development across the continent. Creating initiatives such as the India–Africa Forum Summit is critical to expanding its economic relations. Again, infrastructure remains one of the key priority areas, and Africa needs to critically address its transportation systems, energy and digital connectivity by generating continued funding through Indian lines of credit to guarantee timely implementation of the projects. Additionally, Africa needs to focus

on human resource development through training programmes, scholarships and technological transfer to empower African countries, and this is achievable by aligning itself with the African Development Bank's goals of educational transformation. Observably, Africa lags in terms of healthcare. Thus, prioritising technological transfer and affordable universal healthcare solutions is critical for the continent to be able to leverage India's outstanding experience. Clearly, partnerships in e-commerce governance and cybersecurity between India and Africa are fundamental. Similarly, Africa committing to green technologies, renewable energies and sustainable practices that are aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is key to harnessing new technologies.

Consequently, Africa needs to engage India from a more robust and better-informed position in order to implement its strategies at national, sub-regional and continental level with full involvement from domestic actors, civil society organisations and non-governmental actors (Acharya and Johnston 2007: 10). According to Söderbaum and Taylor (2008), achieving regional development in Africa today requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses all stakeholders, rather than relying on ineffective intergovernmental negotiations. This would also counter and reduce the ill effects emanating from Indian and Chinese penetration into African markets. Existing literature highlights the need for pro-poor and inclusive-growth policies if Africa is to secure meaningful and strategic forms of collaboration. It also underscores the importance of stable macro-economic policies that reduce inflation and fiscal deficits – conditions essential for countries to achieve sustained growth by fully utilising production capacity. Equally important is the stimulation of domestic capital formation, which remains a critical missing link in many African economies. Additionally, African countries can draw more effectively on their diasporas in countries such as India, China and South Africa to meet social, human and financial needs and to support broader economic development. More fundamentally, the continent needs to shift from a production structure dominated by low-value primary commodities to one centred on higher-value-added activities. Achieving this requires strategies that leverage the diaspora's skills, networks and investment

potential, rather than relying almost exclusively on remittances. Chand (2016) postulates that developing a friendlier diaspora policy could enhance Indian and African economic development.

Africa-specific recommendations

1. Africa should ensure diversification of trade beyond conventional sectors in order to promote balanced and sustainable development across the continent.
2. Africa should focus on human resource development through training programmes, scholarships and technological transfer to empower African countries.
3. This study suggests partnerships in e-commerce-governance and cybersecurity are instrumental. African countries committing to green technologies, renewable energies and sustainable practices in line with the SDGs plays a fundamental role in strategic African gains by harnessing new technologies.
4. Pro-poor policies are needed in order for Africa to secure meaningful and strategic collaborations that enable more stable macroeconomic policies that assist in reducing inflation and fiscal deficits.
5. African countries can involve their diasporas in industrialised countries such as India, China and South Africa in providing the high-demand social, human and financial capital needed to fuel economic development across the continent.
6. Lastly, India – often described as the largest democracy in the world – conducts national elections using electronic voting machines with more than 800 million registered voters, and results are declared in a fair, verifiable and credible manner. As a result, the country is peaceful enough for economic development to occur. This chapter recommends that, to help Africa amplify its voice within the NAM and G77+China, it needs to take lessons from India's democratic consolidation, because greater peace and security will help unlock economic development and achievement of the UN's SDGs.

India-specific recommendations

1. India should tap into renewable energy sources to complement its low or insignificant minerals such as oil and gas.
2. Through strengthening of digital infrastructure and connectivity, India would be better positioned to solve its digital divide problem, which would then strengthen its ability to take advantage of Africa's growing technology-user base.
3. Africa is lagging in relation to use of technology in healthcare and energy security. As a result, India could leverage growing needs in these sectors to sell its technology.

Conclusion

Pan-Africanism and Asian–African solidarity concepts are significant in explaining the historical ties between India and Africa. India is now the African continent's accepted mouthpiece, thanks to its use of its technological and economic muscle and political influence to amplify voices from Global South countries. In addition, the convergence of India's technological prowess and Africa's technological needs is manifested in emerging international challenges such as globalisation, terrorism, climate change, food insecurity, sophisticated peacekeeping operations and disease outbreaks. This chapter also notes the ideological challenges, inefficiencies in implementation of projects, lack of economic, social and human capital, lack of commitment to embrace policies for technological transfer, and the vast digital divide between India and Africa. These challenges highlight the complexities of the binaries on how other actors perceive the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South. However, technology-use gaps in Africa present a strong opportunity for India to leverage its technology strengths to tap into existing markets in the ongoing Green Revolution. Conversely, Africa stands to benefit from India's low oil reserves, which makes it almost entirely dependent on the continent's minerals. This study reveals that Africa's exports were comprised of only 14 per cent raw materials, while India's were

made up of 40 per cent finished products. Through importing of India's technologies, Africa stands to improve on value-addition, thus increasing its exports to India. The chapter highlights the role of technology in advancing climate-smart agriculture, an area in which both Africa and India must invest if they are to make meaningful progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. It also shows that the growing exchange of technological knowledge between India and Africa aligns well with Hedley Bull's English School framework: India's use of technology to pursue strategic interests in Africa reflects the interplay between power, order and cooperation within international society. At the same time, the framework underscores collaboration as a central norm, providing a useful lens for understanding how technological transfer can help address Africa's energy, health and agricultural challenges.

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CHAPTER 7

African Agency in a Fragmented Geopolitical Landscape and Amid Struggling Multilateralism: Navigating Pathways for Development

Mikatekiso Kubayi
South African Research Chair on African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

African Agency

Kornegay Jr. and Mthembu (2022) position African integration as a major imperative with considerable potential to improve development outcomes. In their evaluation of Africa's place in the world, they observe an improvement in the exercise of agency. They cite the African Union's (AU's) reform initiative, known as the Kagame Report, the ten-year implementation plans of the AU's Agenda 2063, and the priorities set out in the AU's Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development. In terms of Africa's engagement with global powers, the Kagame Report (2017) recommended that greater coordination be established among the AU, the African Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and the outgoing, current and incoming leadership of the continental body. This was seen as a means of boosting African agency, not just towards global powers broadly, but also towards global powers within the Global South. Eisenhardt (1989) describes agency theory as 'concerned with resolving two problems that can occur in agency relationships. The first is the agency problem that arises when (a) the desires or goals of the principal and agent conflict, and (b) it is difficult or expensive for the principal to verify what the agent is doing. The problem is that the principal cannot verify that the agent

behaved appropriately' (Eisenhardt 1989). A reading of these definitive perspectives from Africa and the Global South powers would suggest that African objectives and goals may conflict with those of the Global South powers. The reverse, where the Global South powers' interests may conflict, is a viewpoint that suggests that African actors may not be completely certain of the actions of the Global South powers, and vice versa.

In an endorsement of the improvement in African agency, Achieng (2014) argues that this development and the use of the African Peer Review Mechanism are not only imperative for attaining the goals of Agenda 2063 but also evidence of African agency. Brown (2012) observes that over the past decade and more, African states have become increasingly prominent actors in high-level international politics, evident in their international trade and climate change negotiations, their relations with the G7, the G20, and a range of new 'South–South' partnerships (Brown 2012: 1889). Notably, it is within the Group of Twenty (G20), more than in other international organisations outside the United Nations (UN), that African nations find space to negotiate their interests in concert with their Global South partners under the South–South rubric. The Global South countries in the G20 include Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey, along with the AU. The G20 Global North countries are Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, South Korea, the UK, and the USA, as well as the European Union (EU). A casual look at the Global South–Global North split shows that the Global South compact in the G20 is better placed to advance African interests. Among other factors, this is because developing countries, or the Global South, within the G20 share similar political and economic objectives and interests in global affairs. Citing the departure of colonial rulers, Ojo (1981) argues that African activity in global affairs has increased and 'accelerated' through its participation in the UN. The same can be argued about the advance of the Global South within the UN, even though achieving equality with Global North powers remains a work in progress.

The AU's Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development (2014–2023) is an ideal point of departure for

African external engagements. The next ten years of the implementation plan will lean heavily on the shared strategic framework. It would be strategic for forward-looking plans to grasp and plan for the differences between the Global South and the Global North. The framework is a sound basis for exercising policy agency in the continental interest. This is important for the voice of Africa to be known, understood and felt in global affairs. There are several areas in which this voice has been found absent. The voice of Africa on UN Security Council (UNSC) reform since the Ezulwini Consensus – the AU's 2005 common position calling for expanded African representation – has been fairly muted. Not much has changed in its voice on the general reforms of the multilateral system, even after the Summit of the Future resolutions of 2024, which sought to prioritise the interests of developing countries, most of which are in the Global South.

South Africa's 2025 G20 presidency marked four years of successive Global South presidencies. The AU is a new member of the G20, an important partner, and a stakeholder in South Africa's G20 presidency. This is not merely an exercise in romanticism; it is important to consolidate Global South gains and push them further. This is certainly not an easy feat. The Trump administration's G20 presidency in 2026 has already proved to be a low point not just for South Africa but for the Global South as a whole. This was evident in the US's opposition to the progressive 'Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability' theme of South Africa's G20 presidency.

The exercise of agency by African state actors is not done in a vacuum, but rather in the environment of a dynamic, currently fragmented geopolitical landscape. This landscape features, among its key characteristics, the rise of trade wars, great power competition and even the re-ignition of concerns about a new scramble for Africa, among other sources of friction. This landscape also features the rise of the Global South, spearheaded by countries such as the BRICS+ members, such as China, Brazil, India, South Africa, Indonesia and Egypt, with Russia adding to the global majority, thereby carving out a new global order.

With the emerging multipolarity, a new global order is in the making and presents an opportune moment for African agency to take shape as

this new order is constructed. It is therefore essential to examine this geopolitical landscape more closely – the outgoing and incoming global order – to gain a deeper understanding of the environment in which Africa's aspirations are to be pursued. Much has been made of debates on the global order, and with good reason. Momentum towards reforming multilateralism, global governance and the global financial architecture is growing. Countries in the Global South, the majority of which are located in Africa, are seeking a greater role in these dynamics.

The global appetite for a new 'order,' especially in the Global South, is not only high but is already here, according to John Rennie Short (2025). Key evidence of this is the frequent engagement of global stakeholders, both within and outside the UN system, at the Summit of the Future in September 2024, hosted by the UN. These forums are geared towards reforming the global governance system first established at the Conference on International Organisation in San Francisco on 26 June 1945, at which the founders of the United Nations signed the UN Charter, ushering in a new global governance regime (UN 1945). This began what many would describe as a new 'world order' of that time. It was a new world order because it replaced the one that preceded it, which lacked a UN but had a League of Nations. It is worth noting that much of Africa, and most of the Global South, were not involved in the creation of the UN. There have also been attempts since 1945 to establish new orders, including the 1970s push for a 'New International Economic Order', formalised in the 1974 UN General Assembly Declaration (UN 1974). Evolution is always imminent with the passage of time, especially when systems do not serve their intended purpose, or when new environmental developments prompt change. One such development is the rise of major emerging market economies such as China, India, Brazil and Russia, which adds to this momentum of economic accumulation. South Africa arguably punches above its weight on the global stage (Draper 2011; Carmody 2017). African agency is applied within a global context and environment that greatly influences the outcomes of its efforts.

The purpose of the UN Charter: the common purpose, the common good

The purpose of the UN Charter is very clear – and its authors, who had just emerged from the brutality of the Second World War, sought a measure that would help prevent a recurrence of another such war. It is, however, interesting to note that, at the time of its promulgation, large swathes of the Global South were fighting colonialism, itself a brutal, imperial governance method. To make this Charter possible, several considerations based on the realities of global regions, such as the need for development, were factored in as prerequisites for lasting stability (UN Charter 1945). Yet, for the most part, the developmental aspects of the then-new global governance architecture were directed towards post-Second World War reconstruction in Europe, rather than in Africa and the Global South. Still, the UN Charter outlines the UN's work and objectives as the premier institution of global governance. A 2020 report by the Stimson Centre and its research team, led by Dr Richard Ponzio, captures the evolution of the institution of global governance briefly when they say that,

> In the midst of a past period of global turmoil – the Second World War, on the heels of the 1930s Great Depression – leaders from the Republic of China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom gathered, in 1944, at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., to consider a new postwar international architecture to succeed the failed League of Nations. Six months later, a gathering of delegates from fifty nations convened in San Francisco to negotiate over two months and then sign, on June 26, the Charter of the United Nations. (Stimson 2020: 9)

In this statement, we see the absence not only of the Global South countries, many of which were still under colonial rule, but also of any meaningful attempt to capture their interests at the time. The UN's common purpose is derived from the Charter, which spells out its objective of achieving and sustaining a lasting global peace. The clearest statement of this is where it says of its expectations in its preamble, that it

is 'to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples' (UN 1945). However, turmoil from the past and some current conflicts around the globe have their roots in various realities, both current and possible, such as economic or security concerns (Fisher 2000). The UN Charter attempts to address these issues. In addressing these issues, the UN has established institutions that, together with other new institutions and policies, have formed an architecture of multilateralism (Keohane 1990). The critique from the Global South, however, is that some of the UN's critical organs and agencies remain in the hands of the founding nations, most of which are in the Global North.

It is through this multilateralism that many, particularly in Africa and the Global South, seek to address the issue of development because, according to Freeman (2004: 1), among other reasons, 'over the period of globalisation world inequality, measured as the ratio of income per capita in the Global South as a whole and the Global North as a whole, has more than doubled, whilst growth has been largely static.' In this respect, the UN's common purpose, as derived from the UN Charter, has not fared very well. The African experience illustrates this, particularly the rebuff of African agency that followed the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980, when the World Bank promoted its 1981 'Berg Report', *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action*, as an alternative framework (Berg 1981).

The Berg Report, prepared for the World Bank, is of particular importance due to its influence at the time, as it demonstrates the relationship between the continent and the World Bank, because, '… one can expect that Bank policies and programme in this region will be guided by it in the near future… also, the report is likely to have a considerable influence on the thinking and actions of bilateral donors, many of whom look to the IBRD [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development] for guidance on economic analysis and policy direction' (Loxley 1983). It is also within the context of the current discourse on multilateral development banks (MDBs), including the Bretton Woods Institutions, regarding the global financial architecture, particularly in institutions such as the G20 (G20 2025).

Finkelstein (1955) writes, however, that the Charter was drawn up at a time of great optimism, with the expectation that the victorious powers would then maintain the post-war peace and police the vanquished. He also describes the pressures for considering Paragraph 3 of Article 109 of the UN Charter, arguing that it 'is the urge to revamp the United Nations to bring it into conformity with circumstances which differ vastly from those which existed when the Charter was drafted' (Finkelstein 1955). Today, there are efforts to reform not only the UN but also multilateralism, with advocacy initiatives such as those of the Article 109 group (Global Challenges Foundation 2025). A key aspect of the UN reform agenda is a greater role for regions that were not involved in its creation. Most of these regions are located in the Global South.

The UN is a post-Second World War (WWII) construct that draws heavily from its Charter, experience of the war, and the need to prevent future wars. However, the post-WWII global governance architecture was designed by the victors of the war, according to Scheffer (2025). While requiring vast sums for their own post-war reconstruction, they established the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) alongside the UN. However, they did not include many of the states that currently constitute the now 193-member UN and that have been heavily impacted by the BWIs for decades, and continue to be. While the founders of the Charter had immediate experience of war and the global power dynamics of the time, characterised by deep polarisation, some, such as Jokela (2011), link the inspiration for the role and importance of increased collective action to a common purpose to globalisation. Jokela also writes about the development of plurilateral institutions, such as the G20, as a derivative of globalisation's influence on collective efforts to address global challenges. Plurilateral organisations are increasingly more representative of a diverse world, bringing together the wealthy Global North and the developing Global South.

Power in multilateralism and 'world order'

Multilateralism also tends to be complex. This is despite the tenets of the UN Charter, which envisions global relations differently. It is often

complicated by bilateral relations, which are framed by the power- and wealth-differential between states. Africa and the several Africa+1 summits have often been criticised for perpetuating a dynamic whereby the power of an entire continent is equated with that of a single developed economy (Mthembu et al. 2022). Even the G20 has seen the theme of inequalities within and between states debated. Others, such as Dworkin and Gowan (2019), discuss the divisive impact of great power competition between the US, Russia and China on Europe, while some criticise the 'new scramble for Africa' (Mlambo et al. 2024). These perspectives speak to the sophisticated complexities of power competition between the Global South and the Global North, within the Global North, and within the Global South.

This complexity sparked considerable academic interest in the International Political Economy (IPE) discipline, resulting in numerous theories within the field. One such theory that captures Africa's negative experience with global relations over many decades is the Hegemonic Stability Theory, proposed by Charles Kindleberger. It suggests that the international system is more stable under the leadership of a single dominant power, such as the unipolar system from which the globe has departed. This unipolar-led system was evident from the early 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed, to the late 2000s (coinciding with the global financial crisis), when the US reigned as the single superpower. Combined with the alliance between the US and Western European countries, this gave the Global North an upper hand in global governance. The end of the brief period of hegemonic stability at the behest of the US ushered in multipolarity, with Global South countries such as China, India and Brazil on the rise in global affairs. Sachs (2020) critiques the multilateral system's inability to provide global public goods, arguing that no single state or group of states is currently positioned to serve as a global hegemon and satisfy the need for such goods. He makes this argument in response to the spectacular collapse of global solidarity and collective action for a common purpose at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Africa was one of the regions left stranded by a shortage of vaccines and equipment, despite a cash-on-hand offer to purchase, because developed economies had hoarded the supply. In other words, the emergence of

multipolarity, in which Global North countries lost some of their global power while some Global South countries rose in prominence, did not necessarily improve the agency of African countries.

A common thread in the reflections of many scholars on multilateralism is the emphasis on power. Chomsky (2003), Strange (1988) and others, such as those who emphasise the US drive for dominance, point to the prominence of power in one guise or another in state-to-state relations. They highlight its significance in current global governance and geopolitics, as well as its influence on multilateralism. One interpretation is that multilateralism disperses power, from the dominant Global North to the hitherto marginalised Global South, including Africa. Keohane (1990) defines multilateralism as 'the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions' (Keohane 1990: 731). This definition appears to align with the UN system, which includes organs such as the Security Council, the General Assembly (GA), and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as other institutions that form part of today's global governance architecture, including the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Security Council, comprising France, the US, Russia, the UK and China, is dominated by the Global North, given that only China is considered a Global South country. The rest of the UN organs include Global South countries, including African states, which constitute the largest group of UN member states. However, the other UN organs lack the binding power of the Security Council.

Multilateralism in these debates is often shaped by understandings of power relations, their roles, and their impacts since the UN was formed in 1945. The unipolarity of the post-Cold War era resembles the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, given that this unilateral US principle carved out the Western hemisphere as a preserve of US dominance, much as the US has dominated certain aspects of global governance. The US National Security Strategy of 2025 (White House 2025) reflects the US objective of prevailing in global governance, grounded in the America First policy, which runs counter to the tenets of multipolarity. The visits to the White House by five African states in July 2025 and by European states in August 2025 illustrate this point, as the leaders from these regions

were essentially paying homage to the US as the dominant power in the international system. This is despite the shift to multipolarity, a topic often debated. All of them were visiting the White House, among other agendas, to discuss the role of the UN and multilateralism in addressing global issues. These developments show that the US, the fulcrum of Global North power, remains important in global affairs. It shows that the Global South is rising but has not yet gained sufficient power to overcome the staying power of the US as the underwriter of Global North power.

Cox (1992) offers an apt reflection on the concepts of 'multilateralism' and world 'order'. He argues that, 'The two concepts are interrelated. Multilateralism appears in one aspect as a subordinate concept. Multilateralism can only be understood within the context in which it exists, and that context is the historical structure of the world order. However, multilateralism is not just a passive, dependent activity. It can appear in another aspect as an active force shaping world order. The agent/structure dilemma is a chicken-and-egg proposition' (Cox 1992: 161).

This is an apt description of the place power and hegemony occupy in global governance, and of how multilateralism is, in practice, heavily influenced, if not shaped, by this dynamic. The two concepts have often been used or quoted interchangeably. The value of this distinction to Africa may lie in the potential instrumentality of multilateralism in shaping a world 'order' in its interests, as noted by Dworkin and Gowan (2019). It is also essential to reflect beyond academic definitions of multilateralism to understand precisely what it is and how it operates. This is useful considering that 'the dominant tendencies in existing world order can be examined within a global system with three principal components – a global political economy, an inter-state system, and the biosphere or global ecosystem' (Cox 1992: 161). From a world-systems perspective, the twentieth-century world order was dominated by the Global North. In the twenty-first century, shifts are being experienced in the Global South, of which Africa is a part, contesting the historical dominance of the Global North. It can thus be surmised that the Global South, as a collective, is a force shaping an emerging global order.

The components of world order discussed above hold significant

value in the African context. The case of EU (Global North) and Africa (Global South) relations is shifting from a history of domination and a dominant–subordinate relationship to a hope of genuine development partnership through a series of bilateral EU–Africa agreements, as noted in Suh (2020). This relationship is complex, as is any other relationship of this nature. A part of the explanation for this could be the changing geopolitical landscape, which provides impetus for reforming global relations through institutions such as the UN and the G20.

One of the highlights of the changing geopolitical landscape is the rise of Africa from being the 'dark continent' (Pimm 2007) to a 'rising star' (Taylor 2014) and a new 'major growth pole for the world economy' (Vickers 2013: 673). This optimistic narrative has become part of the broader Global South discourse that emphasises renewed agency and developmental momentum. This, according to Vickers, is coupled with the rise of new powers such as China, India, Brazil, South Korea and now even Russia, as indicated by new World Bank economic data on European economies, which classifies them as High-Income Countries. Thus, the 'Global South rise' narrative is backed by evidence of economic advancement. The emergence of BRICS+ and its potential to become the largest bloc within the G20 is also significant, as it could drive a development agenda in this prominent global policy coordination group. The BRICS+ bloc (representing 35% of global GDP) is already larger than the G7 (30% of global GDP) in terms of population size and economic output, according to Statista.com (2024). Discussions of this nature begin to seem like the pendulum swinging away from the Global North and towards the Global South.

The rise of Africa as a significant voice in global governance, as evidenced by the inclusion of the AU in an expanded G20, presents an additional opportunity to exercise agency in pursuit of the objectives and aspirations outlined in the AU's Agenda 2063. However, all this occurs amid a 'poly-pandemic' of crises, challenging the very nature of multilateralism as the world knows it, which is meant to aid in conflict prevention and resolution, and promote peace and development. Africa will be watched by the world as it exercises its agency in this environment for its continental interests. From certain viewpoints, African agency in the G20, through the AU, adds

54 countries to the Global South's collective, boosting Global South agency in this important organisation. At the very least, African voices are now being heard on the global stage through the G20.

Multilateralism and its instruments for a new Africa-friendly world 'order'?

The founders of the UN intended for multilateralism to advance the collective global community's objectives at the conference in San Francisco in 1945. These are aspirations for a just world peace, good relations between states, steady development and strong, legitimate global governance. At the centre of it is the UN Charter, which places the attainment of these objectives at the centre of the UN's role and function. However, this was in the mid-1940s, and global relations have evolved significantly since then. The refrain so far in this chapter is that the evolution of the UN has been greatly influenced by the emergence of the Global South countries as members of this global governing body. And, alongside this evolution, the UN has remained the central authority, with no other organisation formed in its place, even though other organisations have emerged, sometimes complementing the UN, and at other times contesting it. Capturing both the state of multilateralism and the material conditions of global relations today, the seminal words of António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, are crucial for and as a basis for a conversation on reforming multilateralism, when he said that,

> "At the beginning of the 20th century, Europe had numerous powers. It was truly multipolar. But it lacked robust multilateral institutions, and the result was World War I. A multipolar world needs strong and effective multilateral institutions. Yet global governance is stuck in time. Look no further than the United Nations Security Council and the Bretton Woods system. They reflect the political and economic realities of 1945, when many countries in this Assembly Hall were still under colonial domination. The world has changed. Our institutions have not. We cannot effectively address problems as

> they are if institutions do not reflect the world as it is. Instead of solving problems, they risk becoming part of the problem. And, indeed, divides are deepening. Divides among economic and military powers. Divides between North and South, East and West. We are inching ever closer to a Great Fracture in economic and financial systems and trade relations, one that threatens a single, open internet, with diverging strategies on technology and artificial intelligence, and potentially clashing security frameworks" (Guterres 2023).

In September 2023, Guterres, in his address to the UN General Assembly, crystallised the case for reforms to the UN and its system very aptly. In his argument, the global challenges are vast and urgent, cutting across all areas of reality, from the economic to the political and security- and development-related. These are pivotal issues for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These are also issues at the core of the UN's purpose, as outlined in its founding Charter. Article 1 of the UN Charter specifically outlines the UN's first and urgent role in developing relations between states in today's world. The Charter authors' objective is for the UN to maintain its centrality in multilateralism.

Guterres' words echo the sentiments of many in the Global South who are critical of the UN in its current form. For instance, it has become clear that reform of the Security Council to include African representation is a matter of justice, because it is unconscionable for a region as large as Africa not to be represented. The structure of the Bretton Woods Institutions, based on the percentage of contributions, which in turn dictates decision-making, is a matter related to inequalities in the global system to the detriment of African countries. The fact that the UN has by and large remained in the form in which it was established in 1945 is a matter of atrophy, because realities such as demographic expansion have shifted meteorically.

Sentiments about reforming the UN or parts of its system are not new. The desire for improved multilateralism and global order is not new. As the UN embarks on a reform process informed by this reality, among other factors, it will still have memories of the desire for a New International

Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s, which was very much an agenda driven by the Global South against the Global North. This is particularly relevant today because, according to Guterres, 'we are inching ever closer to a Great Fracture in economic and financial systems and trade relations' (Guterres 2023). This is when the full potential of a just multilateral system is required to drive collective action towards attaining the SDGs. But this must also be done justly, by ensuring that developing economies are accommodated in areas such as the just transition and climate action, access to development finance, industrialisation, participation in global value chains, pandemic preparedness, and the emerging global security architecture.

Calls by the UN Secretary-General for reforms, beginning with internal operational reforms and extending to the broader UN system, including the Bretton Woods Institutions and the global financial architecture, are informed by work across the globe. One initiative particularly useful for this conversation is the 2023 High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB) report. The HLAB report offers proposals it describes as required 'shifts' to attain an improved multilateral system. Such shifts include thinking and actions that can bring the global community together and improve the legitimacy of global governance. These proposed thoughts and actions involve significant reflection on how the global financial architecture works, including reforms to MDBs and other institutions. The report proposes the following shifts.

The first shift aims to 'Rebuild trust in multilateralism through inclusion and accountability' by, among other things, broadening participation in the international system to include structures such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society and cities, and by adopting a more transparent decision-making process. UNSC reform, particularly its expansion to include African and other countries of the Global South, would constitute a major shift.

The second shift aims to 'deliver for people and planet by regaining balance with nature and providing clean energy for all', by shifting thought and policy action to achieve what India's G20 presidency also advocates for: a new development paradigm that includes environmental conservation and protection in all developmental undertakings. Climate

change has long been a major area of contestation between the Global North and the Global South, and particularly for Africa. Although African countries contribute the least to global greenhouse-gas emissions, they bear some of the most severe impacts of climate change, evident in the desertification of parts of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, as well as the recurrent cyclones and flooding in southern Africa.

The third shift seeks to 'ensure sustainable finance that delivers for all', which includes a better debt management system to help manage and reduce debt, particularly in developing economies, and better access to development finance on better terms that do not hinder domestic priority-setting and policy-making. Most importantly, it seeks to encourage global solidarity in mobilising resources for development, including infrastructure spending that supports climate action and economic and social infrastructure. This also involves 'major reforms' of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), review and reform of debt management, and 'just financing', among other things. Indeed, the global divide that underlies today's inequalities is evident in the heavily indebted Global South versus the Global North, which holds the purse strings of finance and capital.

Shift four seeks to 'support a just digital transition that unlocks the value of data and protects against digital harms', which involves one of the important attributes of Strange's (1988) idea of power: knowledge. This draws a lot of relevance from the motive for reforms of the multilateral system. Minerals, including critical minerals vital for the technology of the present and future, are extracted with little developmental benefit for Africa and other regions of the Global South with natural resource endowment. This remains a difficult colonial legacy, which the AU seeks to remedy. The AU lists this as one of 15 flagship projects in line with its agenda for the renaissance of Africa and in pursuit of the 'Africa we want' by 2063. Knowledge and finance are indeed important aspects of multilateral relations. Additionally, it is important to note that the digital divide between the Global North and the Global South is one of the fissures that demonstrates global inequalities.

Shift five seeks to 'empower equitable, effective collective security arrangements' that involve development as an important step towards

dissuading appetite for violent extremism, among other issues well-articulated by the UN's Agenda 2030. However, any security arrangements will remain inadequate without the involvement of the people concerned and with thorough consideration of the economic, political, geographic, cultural and other material conditions and interests of the concerned regions, such as Africa and the larger Global South. In keeping with social justice virtues, and in pursuit of improved legitimacy for the international system, reforming the UNSC to include regions such as Africa, which has a population of 1,5 billion and projects projected to be worth US$2,5 billion by 2050, is a vital step.

Shift six aims to 'strengthen governance for current and emerging transnational risks', which, in today's context, can best be described as a poly-pandemic. A most recent case of a failure of this element can be argued to be vaccine nationalism and vaccine-hogging during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some states bought up to five times their needs, leaving nothing for countries in the Global South, including Africa, which had cash on hand and sought to procure much-needed vaccines to combat the disease. This is despite all the efforts by the UN system, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) COVAX facility, among other initiatives.

Reforms of the UN system have become a virtuous pursuit. The extensive report by the HLAB makes a strong case for this. Guterres, at the 2023 BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, makes the point that,

> "We must urgently restore trust and reinvigorate multilateralism for the 21st century. This requires the courage to compromise on the reforms necessary for the common good. It requires full respect for the UN Charter, international law, universal values, and all human rights – social, cultural, economic, civil, and political. And it requires much greater solidarity. Of course, none of this is easy. But it is essential. And it is essential, especially for Africa. The African continent, a historic victim of slavery and colonialism, continues to confront grave injustices" (Guterres 2023).

The sentiments of the UN Secretary-General resonate with many scholars

and certainly tally with the daily lived African reality, as a representative of the Global South reality more broadly. It is instructive that Guterres' views above were made to an audience of the Global South, of which BRICS has emerged as an important platform. In reflecting on the UN's successes and failures, Nadine (2019: 12) first recounts that 'the founders saw the UN as the heart of international economic and political relations – an organisation with the power and capacity to solve the world's most pressing problems'. He argues that this was based on three main pillars: maintaining international peace; addressing economic, social, cultural and humanitarian issues; and promoting human rights. While some successes can be noted, the state of multilateralism today cannot list these three areas as theatres of resolute success since 1945, at least not in the African reality. The failures inform the reason why the Global South has become an avenue for African countries to pursue UN reforms while at the same time seeking alternatives outside of the UN.

Africa's independence and multilateralism

The total liberation and emergence of Africa from colonialism is at the core of the efforts behind the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963. In a significant demonstration of agency, Africa took a step on what was to be a long journey towards its formal inclusion in institutions such as the G20 six decades later, in recognition of its rising significance in 2023. One important error in the process of the UN's formation, which undergirds the multilateral system, is the exclusion of the majority from the design process of multilateralism and the institutions that maintain it. When the UN adopted its Charter, it had good intentions, namely the promotion of lasting global peace, stability and economic development for all (UN Charter 1945). However, it did not anticipate and factor in the self-governance or independence of African states. Ajaegbo (1986) noted, 'When the UN was founded in 1945, only three independent African States – Ethiopia, Liberia, and Egypt – were members of the world body. South Africa also participated even though it was not, by definition, free. Most of Africa was still under colonial domination.' It was at least another fifteen years before many

more African states gained independence from colonial powers, following prolonged struggles. This was also the case with a few other Asian, Latin American and Caribbean countries.

From the outset, the global governance architecture was not designed with an eye to equality among states, but perhaps with an emphasis on equality among the founding powers. According to Fox (1950), 'organized international intervention in colonial affairs has never found favour in the eyes of the European colonial powers. It did not at San Francisco when they sought to restrict the United Nations role in non-self-governing territories.' This is one of the original sins of the UN; it was set up in a manner slanted against the then-colonised countries, which we today understand as constituting the Global South. Nonetheless, independence was inevitable, and the eventual new reality would require the responsibility for Africa's development to lie somewhere. The establishment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in 1958, with its headquarters in Addis Ababa (Henry 1962), is an example of the compartmentalisation of African issues.

Agency was demonstrated in the anti-colonial struggles for dignity and independence, and for the rightful place of African states as equals among others in the global community. But that was not the last demonstration of African agency in the multilateral sphere. Most recently, Namibia co-facilitated the Summit of the Future with Germany, which is an interesting and positive case of a Global South country partnering with a Global North country, the former a (former) colony of the latter. The adoption of the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation (United Nations 2024), as well as many other similar progressive developments in global governance, has been championed by Africa with the support of broader Global South solidarity. Several instruments of the UN system have established offices in Africa, including the WTO, the WHO and the International Labour Organization (ILO), among others, thereby fully placing Africa within the UN's ambit. However, this did not spare Africa from the negative consequences of structural adjustment policies imposed by the Bretton Woods Institutions (Heidhues and Obare 2011; Mkandawire and Soludo 2003). Neither did it shield it from sustained colonial interference, as seen in the case of France's role in the

now-troubled Sahel region and other West African countries, a case of the negative long-term effects of Global North neocolonialism.

It is often thought that Africa is a weak link on several fronts in the global system, particularly in the Global South. There are, however, indicators that show Africa's rising contributions. Development has since been a dominant pursuit of the AU and its predecessor, the OAU. Independent Africa has also seen a relative growth in its contribution to global GDP. It shares in the several industrial revolutions, with a consensus that it is in its fourth, while some suggest it may already be in its fifth. What is the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)? There are various ways of explaining or defining it, such as Moll's characterisation of a deep-seated, digitally powered and rapid change. It is a revolution of 'smart machines' and 'information technology' (Moll 2023). In his review of Moll's argument, Ntlatlapa (2023) argues that Moll's definition is narrow and insufficient to encompass its impact or role across all spheres of life, as Schwab (2016) notes. An expanded conceptualisation of the 4IR shows that Africa has not been entirely left behind. In some respects, Africa is partaking of the 4IR thanks to investments and support from Global South partners such as China and India. China has been particularly instrumental in building the African digital infrastructure, for instance, enabling access to the internet and mobile telephony.

Much as Africa has been co-opted into these industrial revolutions, it has not kept pace with other regions of the world. Africa wants to industrialise rapidly, taking its place in the global production value chain. The AU's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and its 15 flagship projects are a point of departure for this conversation. These flagship projects are meant to propel Africa's renaissance at a point of an industrial revolution characterised by rapid development in technology, such as the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence (AI), which have changed and advanced production methods, healing methods, teaching methods and general communication methods, among many other modern advancements. It is not hard to imagine the financial outlays Africa would require to be on the cutting edge of tech renewal, given the African Development Bank's commitment to investing over US$200 billion per annum to bring Africa up to par with Global North and Global South powers. The continent

has not advanced to a state-of-the-art level of modern infrastructure nor developed technological capabilities comparable to those of other regions. Despite possessing essential critical minerals as a natural endowment, Africa has yet to advance its space programme to levels comparable to those of advanced economies, or develop semiconductor fabrication capabilities. Both the digital technology and the critical minerals spaces constitute areas in which Africa should be focused on reform of the multilateral system. In both sectors, regulations by the UN and other global governance systems are weak, exposing Africa and many parts of the Global South to mercantilist exploitation by the Global North (as well as exploitation by some Global South powers).

Conclusion

Africa has long shifted from independence to the post-independence pursuit of development and a place in the global order. Its adoption of Agenda 2063 can be seen as an acceptance of its role in multilateralism to advance its agenda and those of the Global South. Capable Multilateralism, with instruments to develop a new Africa- and Global South-friendly world order, is precisely what the Global South is pursuing in its reformist agenda, as demonstrated by efforts at the Summit of the Future in September 2024. It is a multilateralism that the UN Secretary-General argues must be fit for purpose, in keeping with new realities. It is this multilateralism, coupled with a global financial architecture conducive to significant African investment in research and development, productive capacity and capability, and sensitive to the continent's substantial debt burden, that offers a viable pathway for Africa's full participation in the global order.

Africa's ascension onto the high tables of multilateralism has come at a time of significant difficulty for all humanity. The world is facing a polycrisis – a cocktail of multiple global-scale crises occurring simultaneously. They include rising, unsustainable global public debt, the climate crisis and insecurity caused by conflict, among others. The recent COVID-19 pandemic was yet another of the multiple crises humanity has faced. It was at this moment that the power differential shaping the multilateral environment in which Africa must exercise

its agency was at its most brutal. Vaccine nationalism demonstrated a very dark side of this power differential. Africa demonstrated yet another act of agency when it collectively mobilised resources to procure supplies and confront the pandemic.

In this conversation, the principal is the African people, whose development has long been hindered by myriad factors, including the fact that a world order was created without their input, as argued by Kissinger (2014). The agent is the state, the AU, and other African players with power and influence at that level. Therefore, what is to be done is (1) the effective application of agency in the interest of the continent's people, (2) the application of agency in such a way as to drive, with great focus and sheer will, the fulfilment of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, and realise the continent's renaissance in its full potential. The AU's fifteen flagship projects are a good starting point. Stevens et al. (2023) of Standard Bank, South Africa, argue that 'the onus is on African policymakers to draw more developmental value from relations with China.'

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CHAPTER 8

Boosting Health: Leveraging Africa-China Relations to Achieve SDG 3

Kabaso Kabwe
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Job Allan Wefwafwa
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Introduction

Global health geopolitics are undergoing significant realignments. The retreat of traditional Western donors, most notably the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has created new vacuums in development financing across Africa. Multilateral institutions like the World Health Organization (WHO) face funding constraints, and global attention is shifting towards climate, migration and security concerns, often at the expense of health investment.[1] As this landscape evolves, China's growing health footprint in Africa, particularly under the Health Silk Road, has become a focal point of Africa's development partnerships. Amidst this shifting terrain, China has increasingly positioned itself as an 'all-weather friend' to Africa, a consistent partner in times of global uncertainty (Visser and Cezne 2023). This rhetoric, often repeated at FOCAC summits and diplomatic forums, contrasts with the retreat of traditional donors and is key to China's narrative of solidarity and shared destiny (Green 2018). However, this framing also raises important questions about how such solidarity translates into long-term health investments and equitable partnerships.

This chapter attempts to interrogate how African actors are navigating these shifts and leveraging China's engagement to advance Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3, Good Health and Well-being), which

seeks to 'ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages' (UN 2015). With less than five years to the 2030 deadline for attaining the SDGs, Africa remains off track on several SDG 3 targets, including maternal mortality reduction, universal health coverage and epidemic preparedness. It is important to state that, while this chapter centres on SDG 3 as the thematic anchor, the primary objective is not to assess quantitative progress towards its individual targets. Instead, the analysis is situated within a broader inquiry into global health governance, power dynamics within the Global South, and the strategic exercise of African agency. SDG 3 thus serves as a lens through which these issues are examined, allowing for a deeper understanding of how Africa is reconfiguring its health partnerships and positioning within a multipolar world.

Against this backdrop, the chapter asks: how is Africa leveraging its relationship with China in the health sector to advance SDG 3, and what does this reveal about African agency in the Global South? To answer this, the chapter focuses on Africa–China health cooperation, particularly through the Health Silk Road, a component of the Belt and Road Initiative launched in 2015. This includes investments in public health infrastructure, training, vaccine access and disease control. Although African actors, from the African Union (AU) and the Africa Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC) to national governments, have shown some strategic intent in shaping these engagements, questions remain about the scale, sustainability and equity of China's health aid, especially given its preference for bilateral over multilateral channels and its relatively modest investments in social sectors compared to economic infrastructure.

This analysis takes place within the broader context of the Global South, within which China is often viewed as a leading actor promoting solidarity and common development objectives. But intra-South hierarchies persist, and Africa frequently finds itself on the periphery. The asymmetries within the Global South are particularly visible in global health, where decision-making power often lies outside the continent, and Africa's disease burden is not matched by commensurate investment or leadership (Wiyeh et al. 2025; Xie et al. 2025). This contradiction

invites reflection on how African actors can use forums like the Group of 77 (G77), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) not just as venues of engagement, but as platforms of influence. This chapter applies a dual framework: constructivism and African agency.

Constructivism allows us to see how shared norms, historical ties and mutual identity claims shape Africa–China cooperation. African agency, on the other hand, helps to assess how African actors – from the AU to national actors – navigate, contest and co-create health partnerships. These theoretical tools are used here to unpack three illustrative cases: the establishment of Africa CDC, Africa's vaccine diplomacy during COVID-19, and health infrastructure investments like the China–Africa Friendship Hospitals. By examining these cases, the chapter highlights both the promise and pitfalls of Africa's health diplomacy with China. On the one hand, Africa has exercised significant agency, securing financing, shaping priorities and aligning health interventions with regional strategies like the AU's Agenda 2063 and the Africa Health Strategy (2016–2030). On the other hand, challenges such as donor dependency, unequal bargaining power, questions on long-term capacity, and domestic financing constrain this agency.

More importantly, this chapter thus argues that Africa's health engagement with China is not merely reactive or externally driven. It is informed by historical experiences, regional strategies and a growing awareness of Africa's own power within an evolving multipolar world. Through intentional partnerships and strategic use of Global South forums, Africa is not only advancing SDG 3 but also renegotiating its place in global health governance.

Theoretical framework: African agency and constructivism in global health

To analyse Africa–China health cooperation and its implications for SDG 3, this chapter employs two interlinked theoretical frameworks: African agency, and constructivism. These frameworks help to assess how Africa navigates power asymmetries within the Global South and to unpack

the ideological and strategic underpinnings of the health partnership. African agency refers to the capacity of African actors, states, institutions and civil society to pursue and shape outcomes in international relations, especially in the face of structural constraints. As scholars such as Brown (2012) and Chipaike et al. (2018) argue, Africa is not merely a site of external influence but a political space where actors exercise decision-making power, negotiate partnerships and assert priorities.

Brown (2012) offers four dimensions of agency: National states, where states negotiate bilateral deals; state-based actors, including leaders and concerned ministries; collective organisations, such as the AU and Africa CDC; and non-state actors, such as think tanks, media and civil society. In the health sector, agency can be reflected in Africa's ability to, among other things, influence the design and implementation of health projects, set health priorities through regional strategies, and use multilateral forums to negotiate better terms or global reforms. African agency is therefore not absolute, as it operates within global hierarchies and constraints.

Constructivism shifts the focus from material power to the ideational forces, norms, identities and shared meanings that shape international cooperation (Checkel 1998). In this context, China's engagement with Africa is not just strategic but also symbolic, framed by narratives of South–South solidarity, shared developmental trajectories and anti-colonial ties. As Killen et al. (2018) and Viser and Cezne (2023) note, China-Africa relations – and by extension health diplomacy – are often portrayed as being based on friendship, equality and mutual benefits rooted in China's own experience as a developing country. Its medical assistance during the 2014 Ebola outbreak and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic invoked norms of solidarity and moral duty, aligning with its self-identity as a leader of the Global South.

However, constructivism also draws attention to identity tensions. Africa's identity is often constructed around survival, vulnerability and aid dependence (Wiyeh et al. 2025). By contrast, China projects itself as a rising global power, even within South–South discourse. These contrasting identities can create misalignments. For example, while China may prioritise health infrastructure to demonstrate capability

and prestige, African actors may seek investments in primary healthcare or health workforce development. Shared norms, however, remain a powerful force that illustrates how identity and norms shape global health diplomacy (Kickbusch and Liu 2022).

The NAM and G77 are not merely symbolic bodies; they are tools of strategic action. African states used these platforms to push for vaccine equity during the COVID-19 pandemic, to demand reforms to ensure fairer representation, and to advocate for technology transfers and local pharmaceutical production.[2] By aligning their interests with China's own critiques of Western-dominated global health governance, African actors can forge solidarities that go beyond bilateral negotiations. These platforms offer space for both dialogue and political engagement, allowing Africa to be seen not just as a beneficiary, but as a co-shaper of global health governance.

Constructivism and African agency offer a dimensional lens to explain why Africa–China health cooperation is possible, rooted in shared identity, mutual narratives and discursive alignment, and how African actors shape and navigate that cooperation through negotiation, institutional innovation and multilateral engagement, respectively. This lens is applied to three case studies: the creation of Africa CDC, Africa's COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy, and health infrastructure investments under the Health Silk Road. These illustrate the tensions, opportunities and strategic possibilities at the heart of Africa's health diplomacy with China.

Background: Africa–China health cooperation and the Health Silk Road

Africa–China health cooperation is best understood as a negotiated partnership shaped by historical connections, changing interests and the influence of Global South solidarity (Brown 2012; Chipaike et al. 2018). It is both rooted in history and continually evolving, influenced by geopolitical changes, shared development goals, and strategic decisions by both parties. While often overshadowed by China's large-scale infrastructure investments, the health dimension of the relationship has grown in significance, especially under the Health Silk Road, an offshoot

of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (He 2024). This section outlines the evolution of Africa–China health engagement and shows how, while aid dependence persists, African actors have increasingly sought to assert agency and co-define the terms of these partnerships.

China's health engagement in Africa dates back to 1963, when it sent its first medical team to Algeria in response to a plague outbreak (Huang 2010). Over the following decades, Chinese medical teams became a regular feature across the continent, offering clinical services in under-resourced regions. Initially symbolic of anti-colonial solidarity and revolutionary camaraderie, these missions gradually evolved into structured bilateral programmes (Lin et al. 2016). The launch of FOCAC in 2000 marked a new phase in formalising health collaboration, which has seen health commitments become a steady feature of FOCAC action plans, ranging from promises to build hospitals and malaria control centres, to pledges of medical scholarships and training programmes (He 2024; Killeen et al. 2019). However, health investments have historically been modest compared to China's large-scale funding for roads, railways and extractives (Dolan et al. 2023).

In 2015, China launched the Health Silk Road as part of the BRI, with the goal of enhancing global health through cooperation on disease prevention, health infrastructure, training and emergency response between China and BRI members (Habibi and Zhu 2021.) This initiative was framed as part of China's commitment to promoting a 'shared future for mankind', positioning the country as a leader of Global South solidarity (Habibi and Zhu 2021). For Africa, the Health Silk Road has offered both opportunities and challenges. It has opened access to new sources of financing and expertise, including hospitals, laboratory networks, and disease control programmes (Alping 2021). Nevertheless, the scale of health funding remains small. Between 2000 and 2017, China's total health aid to Africa was approximately US$1,6 billion, a fraction of its overall investments on the continent (Dolan et al. 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified Health Silk Road activities in Africa, with China supporting efforts to combat the pandemic in many ways, from supplying masks and test kits, to enabling vaccine supply. These efforts allowed China to continue to position itself as an 'all-weather friend' to Africa at a

time when Western donors were criticised for vaccine hoarding.

African actors, too, have not just been passive recipients of Chinese health engagement. The AU, national governments and subregional blocs have attempted to articulate clear health priorities, drawing from frameworks such as Agenda 2063 and the Africa Health Strategy (2016–2030) (AUC 2015). These frameworks have guided Africa's negotiations at FOCAC and other forums, ensuring that health partnerships reflect regional ambitions, such as universal health coverage and health security (AUC 2017). FOCAC summits have increasingly reflected African priorities in their health pledges, and African leaders have used these moments to call for more investment in health infrastructure and local drug production. For instance, between 2005 and 2006, China significantly increased malaria control commitments (by 1 946 per cent) due to the prioritisation of malaria at FOCAC, which was a big health burden in most African countries (Dolan et al. 2023). FOCAC summits in 2021 (Dakar) and 2024 (Beijing) also prioritised African health priorities such as the capacity of African health institutions like Africa CDC.

However, it is still difficult to follow up on health promises. Although FOCAC coordinating plans have recognised procedures for follow-up, reporting and monitoring methods remain inadequate, with little openness regarding how commitments are implemented (FOCAC Coordinators' Meeting 2022). In a similar vein, Chinese health assistance has frequently prioritised high-profile projects, such as hospitals and gifts of medical supplies, over long-term structural changes to health systems. Although these initiatives have improved local medical capabilities and are useful, their sustainability may not be uniform (Dolan et al. 2023). Additionally, aid has been concentrated on a small number of nations, such as Ghana, Angola, Zimbabwe and Cameroon, which collectively receive around 69 per cent of China's health assistance (Shajalal et al. 2017). This implies that allocation is influenced by elements other than health necessity, such as commercial and geopolitical concerns (Gelpern et al. 2021). For African leaders, these gaps highlight the importance of stronger continental coordination to ensure that pledges are better tracked, and that health investments align more consistently with Africa's long-term priorities.

China's participation in multilateral forums, including the G77+China and its historical ties to the NAM, however, offer points of convergence with African positions, as these alliances are often shaped as much by geopolitical strategy as by shared development goals (Kickbusch and Liu 2022). While the rhetoric of solidarity remains strong, African actors need to remain vigilant to ensure that partnerships truly reflect continental health priorities. As the next section will demonstrate, African actors have shown that they are not always passive recipients of aid but selective agents capable of shaping, steering and leveraging partnerships to advance their health and development goals. The case studies that follow, though not exhaustive, highlight key moments where African agency has been both visible and impactful.

Case studies: African agency in health cooperation with China

The following case studies illustrate how African actors have exercised agency across bilateral, continental and multilateral settings. Rather than offering a comprehensive review of Africa–China health cooperation, they highlight strategic actions taken to align partnerships with African priorities, even amid structural imbalances and competing interests within the Global South. The aim is not to suggest that Africa has transcended aid dependence altogether, but rather that agency is visible in specific cases, as the following section shows.

Africa Centres for Disease Control and public health emergency preparedness

The establishment of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) stands as a key example of African agency in strengthening public health systems through external partnerships, including with China. The idea for a continent-wide public health body gained momentum after the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which revealed major gaps in regional disease surveillance, early warning systems and emergency preparedness. With several deaths and global concern over spillover risks, African leaders recognised that a more

coordinated, homegrown response capacity was urgently needed (AUC 2017).

Following initial pledges from the US, given its experience with the US Centres for Disease Control (CDC) and an agreement to support technical design, training and seed funding, China stepped in with funding and technical support at a critical moment when the US scaled back its involvement due to shifting geopolitical priorities, particularly after 2016, when US global health investments began declining under the first Trump administration (AUC 2020; VOA 2022). The Chinese government financed the construction of the US$80 million Africa CDC headquarters in Addis Ababa as part of its broader Health Silk Road commitments. Its construction was formally announced at the 2018 FOCAC Summit and completed in early 2023 (AUC 2020; CIDCA 2023). This decision shifted the Africa CDC project from being a Western-led initiative to one grounded in Global South cooperation, offering a clear example of how Africa can strategically adjust its partnerships to advance its regional health goals.

African leaders and AU technocrats played a decisive role in shaping the structure and priorities of Africa CDC. From the outset, the institution was designed to support the Africa Health Strategy (2016–2030) and to align with Agenda 2063's goal of building health resilience (AUC 2015). Rather than adopting an external model wholesale, African policymakers tailored the Africa CDC's structure to the continent's needs. It was organised with five regional collaborating centres in Egypt (North), Nigeria (West), Gabon (Central), Kenya (East), and Zambia (South), ensuring continental coverage and integration with existing national and regional health institutions[3]. African officials also insisted on embedding the Africa CDC within AU governance structures, reinforcing continental ownership (AUC 2017; He 2024). In this way, Africa CDC became more than a donor-funded project; rather, it was a vehicle for African states to exercise collective agency by defining priorities, shaping institutional mandates and coordinating cross-border health strategies. This is particularly important in an international environment where aid is often donor-driven and externally determined.

Since its formal launch in 2017, and especially during the COVID-19

pandemic, Africa CDC has increasingly operated as a continental hub for emergency coordination, technical guidance and regional health diplomacy. During the pandemic, the AU and Africa CDC led a multi-faceted response to combat COVID-19 on the continent and advocate for the African region globally (Nash 2023). Africa CDC coordinated continent-wide surveillance and testing protocols, issued policy guidance on vaccine rollout and risk communication, played a central role in the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT) and African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT), thereby helping to structure collective procurement mechanisms and partnered with international actors to develop training programmes for public health professionals (UNICEF 2021). In 2021, Africa CDC launched the Partnership for African Vaccine Manufacturing (PAVM) to strengthen local production capacity, again reflecting a forward-looking strategy to reduce reliance on external supplies and donors (Africa CDC 2022).

Through these initiatives, Africa CDC is transitioning from a technical agency to an actor in continental health diplomacy. In addition, the AU and Africa CDC advanced the concept of a New Public Health Order for Africa, whose aim is to strengthen the self-sufficiency of African public health systems, address global health imbalances through a collective African voice, and enhance the continent's efficiency in preparedness and response to disease threats (Africa CDC 2023). Through the New Public Health Order for Africa, regional institutions such as the Africa Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP), PAVM and Africa Medicines Agency, among others, are facilitating new practices and laying the groundwork for Africa to claim more ownership over key public health resources that the region knows it cannot count on global institutions to provide (Nash 2023).

At FOCAC 2021 and 2024, African leaders also called on China to support Africa CDC's ongoing operational needs, not just infrastructure, and to partner on laboratory networks, disease modelling and joint research (FOCAC 2021; FOCAC 2024). However, evidence of sustained follow-up and financial support from China between summits has been limited, perhaps due to the lack of a comprehensive approach and coherent strategy for China's health diplomacy (Lin et al. 2016).

Lessons and limitations on agency

This case shows an African agency at both the design and operational levels. African actors created the institutional blueprint, adjusted strategies when Western support waned, and brought China in on terms that largely aligned with continental needs. Today, Africa CDC serves as a key mechanism for regional coordination, negotiation and technical leadership, all expressions of agency in a field where Africa has long been marginalised (Nash 2023). While notable success has been achieved, it still faces several structural challenges. Africa CDC's financial sustainability is not fully secured, as much of its funding is still dependent on external donors, since AU member states contribute inconsistently. In addition, while it has been active in pandemic response, its reach across the broader health system, such as routine immunisation, health system financing or non-communicable disease control, remains limited (He 2024).

This over-reliance on external technical and financial partners, including China, also raises questions about institutional independence and long-term resilience. The risk must nonetheless be balanced with recognition of the agency for securing and shaping external support to meet regional goals. It shows that, at times like the period of this case, African health actors have not simply accepted what was given, they have made demands, set conditions and, in some cases, steered partnerships in alignment with African-led strategies. However, this agency must now evolve from institution-building towards systemic consolidation, such as ensuring predictable financing, expanding technical capacity and using multilateral forums to mobilise long-term support from both Global South and Global North partners. In this way, Africa CDC can be a cornerstone not just of health security, but of African leadership in global health governance.

Vaccine equity and COVID-19 response

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep global inequities in access to vaccines, diagnostics and health technologies. For Africa, the crisis

became not only a public health emergency but also a test of its ability to assert influence in securing life-saving resources. Faced with vaccine nationalism by Western powers, African actors turned to multiple partners, including China, while simultaneously leveraging multilateral platforms to push for reforms in global health governance. When vaccines became available in 2020, high-income countries quickly locked-in most supplies through pre-purchase agreements, leaving many low- and middle-income countries, especially in Africa, at the back of the queue (Kickbusch and Liu 2022). The WHO noted that, by mid-2021, over 87 per cent of doses administered globally had gone to wealthier nations, while low-income countries received only 0,2 per cent (WHO 2021). The COVAX facility, designed to promote equitable distribution, struggled to meet its targets due to funding shortfalls and supply chain bottlenecks (Usher 2021).

In this context, African actors demonstrated significant agency to assert greater control over vaccine access. The AU, through Africa CDC and in partnership with the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), established the AVAT. AVAT negotiated directly with manufacturers, breaking from the traditional donor-driven model and signalling a shift towards more autonomous and strategic health diplomacy (Nash 2023; UNICEF 2021). China emerged as a key partner in these efforts, framing its vaccine donations and sales as acts of solidarity within the Global South. Through bilateral agreements and support via FOCAC frameworks, China supplied millions of doses of Sinopharm and Sinovac vaccines to African countries, overtaking COVAX as the largest single source of vaccines for African countries (Development Reimagined 2021).

By the end of 2021, China had provided more than 180 million doses to Africa, through a mix of donations and commercial sales (He 2024). Beyond direct supply, China supported local production, storage and distribution initiatives. A notable example is the partnership with Egypt's state-owned VACSERA to make it the largest producer and storage facility for Sinovac vaccines, positioning Egypt as a regional hub for vaccine manufacturing (Egypt Today 2022). In South Africa, similar cooperation unfolded between the Biovac Institute and the global pharmaceutical producer Pfizer, which enabled in-country manufacturing of COVID-19

vaccines for exclusive distribution across the AU, highlighting Africa's strategies to diversify partnerships and reduce reliance on any single source (RSA 2021). Meanwhile, China's support must be understood not purely as altruistic. Vaccine diplomacy allowed Beijing to strengthen its soft power, helping to counter criticism of its early handling of the pandemic and reinforcing its soft power and leadership in the Global South (Knight 2020). Nevertheless, African states actively navigated these dynamics, combining Chinese support with bilateral, multilateral and domestic efforts to meet urgent needs.

Africa's engagement in the pandemic response extended beyond negotiating vaccine donations from partners like China or the COVAX facility. The continent also demonstrated agency in global health governance, taking a leading role in pushing for systemic reforms. In partnership with India, and endorsed by the AU, South Africa and other African states spearheaded the proposal for a temporary waiver of certain provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2020. The initiative sought to allow low- and middle-income countries to manufacture COVID-19 vaccines and related technologies without facing intellectual property barriers (MSF 2020; Sekalala et al. 2021). Although initially resisted by high-income countries, the waiver proposal gained momentum with backing from China and other G77 members, as well as some high-income countries. This coordinated advocacy showcased Africa's ability to use multilateral platforms to influence global health debates (Kickbusch and Liu 2022; Nash 2023). However, the final WTO decision in June 2022 fell short of the original ambition, as Global North countries and pharmaceutical companies resisted some aspects – such as exclusions on diagnostics and therapeutics to treat COVID-19 – highlighting the myriad challenges of translating advocacy into meaningful change in global rules, including power asymmetries (Sekalala et al. 2021).

Lessons and limitations on agency

The pandemic response revealed both the possibilities and constraints

of African agency. On the one hand, the continent engaged multilateral forums, regional institutions and bilateral partners to mitigate inequities. On the other hand, longstanding global power imbalances and the transactional nature of vaccine diplomacy limited Africa's ability to shape outcomes fully. Still, the AU and other regional actors' ongoing and steady work on vaccine distribution and patent waivers had a huge impact on changing public opinion and stories, which can be seen in the fact that a patent waiver on vaccines was finally granted after two years of work (Nash 2023). The agency displayed here therefore must be acknowledged.

While many of the vaccine engagements focused primarily on short-term supply, they nonetheless played a critical role in meeting Africa's immediate public health needs at the height of the crisis. At the same time, fewer initiatives translated into long-term investments such as technology transfer, joint research or large-scale manufacturing capacity, which are vital for breaking cycles of dependency (Said et al. 2022). The Egypt–Sinovac partnership stood out as a positive step towards local production and pharmaceutical sovereignty, but similar models were less widely replicated across the continent. It shows both the progress achieved and the scope that remains for Africa to further leverage its partnerships, including with China, to secure more sustainable health gains (Dolan et al. 2023).

Despite the inequality in securing access to vaccines, it can indeed be seen that Africa's response went beyond securing vaccines. It involved a layered strategy of engaging China and other partners bilaterally, asserting demands within multilateral forums like the WTO, and advancing regional mechanisms like AVAT. Constructivist insights help us to explain how narratives of Global South solidarity enabled engagement, while also exposing how these narratives intersected with China's strategic interests. For Africa, the pandemic experience brings to light the need to build resilient health systems, invest in local manufacturing, and strengthen health diplomacy, all of which the AU and Africa CDC, through the various regional institutions, are pushing for. These are critical areas where African agency can continue to deepen, ensuring future partnerships are not just reactive, but rooted in long-term continental priorities.

Health infrastructure and capacity building

Health infrastructure development has been one of the most visible features of Africa–China cooperation. From hospitals and clinics to disease control centres and laboratories, Chinese-funded health facilities are now part of the health landscapes in many African countries. These projects serve both symbolic and functional roles in that they showcase China's commitment to solidarity and development while also addressing Africa's pressing need for expanded healthcare infrastructure.

China's investment in Africa's health infrastructure dates back several decades, but accelerated after the launch of FOCAC in 2000. The China–Africa Friendship Hospitals, constructed in various countries, have become flagship projects of this partnership (He 2024; Huang 2010). In Zambia, for instance, China has undertaken high-visibility health collaborations such as the 2024 Paired Hospital Cooperation between the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhengzhou University and Levy Mwanawasa University Teaching Hospital, which involved equipment donations, infrastructure upgrades and expert training (People's Daily 2024). Similarly, in Ethiopia, China funded the Addis Ababa Silk Road General Hospital, a US$30 million private investment positioned as a regional hub for advanced care (Habibi and Zhu 2017). In Sierra Leone, China supported the rebuilding of hospitals destroyed during the civil war and the construction of diagnostic laboratories following the Ebola crisis (Aiping 2021). These investments align with China's broader development cooperation model of delivering high-visibility, tangible infrastructure that serves both developmental and diplomatic purposes (Dolan et al. 2023).

African governments, for their part, have exercised agency by directing Chinese aid to priority areas, whether maternal health, infectious disease control or tertiary care facilities (Yang et al. 2018). While China often proposes infrastructure projects as part of its broader cooperation frameworks, African actors are not passive recipients. National health ministries, and even the AU, have engaged in negotiations to ensure that infrastructure support aligns with national and regional priorities. For

example, countries like Rwanda and Ghana have deliberately steered Chinese investments toward community-level health facilities rather than exclusive focus on tertiary hospitals (Shalajah et al. 2017). In addition, African leaders have increasingly sought to integrate these infrastructure projects within longer-term efforts to strengthen health systems. This includes requesting training for local health workers, partnerships for hospital management and the provision of medical equipment as part of infrastructure deals (Aiping 2021; Lin et al. 2016). In many African countries, China's medical teams have combined clinical services with the training of local health workers and some elements of joint research and knowledge exchange (Aiping 2021). African governments continue to advocate for aid that moves beyond brick-and-mortar investments towards proper technology transfer, skills development and health system resilience. For example, at FOCAC 2021, African leaders emphasised the need for China to support digital health solutions and hospital management systems, though concrete outcomes have been slow to materialise (FOCAC 2021).

Although their impact has sometimes been uneven, with challenges in staffing, maintenance and integration into local systems once external support winds down (Yang et al. 2018), China's health infrastructure projects in Africa, such as hospitals and clinics, have delivered visible benefits and vital services. Many projects have also relied heavily on Chinese firms, offering fewer opportunities for technology transfer or local capacity building (Gelpern et al. 2021). These gaps do not diminish the value of the facilities but speak to the need for stronger African negotiation to secure sustainability measures. They also highlight why better follow-up across FOCAC summits is essential, not just to track promises but to ensure projects align with Africa's long-term health priorities under SDG 3 and Agenda 2063 (AUC 2015; Dolan et al. 2023).

Lessons and limitations on agency

Notwithstanding these challenges, there have been notable examples of African actors using infrastructure aid as a platform to push for deeper capacity building. The health infrastructure partnership with

China illustrates both the possibilities and the constraints of African agency. African governments have steered Chinese aid towards national priorities in many cases, demonstrating a degree of control over external assistance. However, the structure of these partnerships – often driven by Chinese lending models, contractor preferences and soft power goals – has limited Africa's ability to ensure that such investments contribute fully to sustainable health system strengthening. Going forward, deeper integration of infrastructure aid with health workforce development, technology transfer and systemic reforms will be crucial. African agency, if further mobilised through bilateral negotiations and multilateral advocacy, can help shift health cooperation towards models that not only build facilities but also build capacity.

Opportunities and challenges for African agency

The case studies of the Africa CDC, vaccine diplomacy and health infrastructure investments reveal that African agency in health cooperation with China is neither uniform nor static. It is dynamic, multi-level, and often negotiated under structural constraints. The case studies highlight that African agency is multifaceted and shaped by multiple actors operating at different levels, aligning closely with Brown's (2012) typology of agency in African foreign relations. This framework distinguishes four dimensions: national state actors, state-based institutions, collective organisations, and non-state actors. Each has played a role in the Africa–China health partnership.

At the national level, states like Egypt and South Africa – and indeed many others have – negotiated bilateral health agreements with China, often tailored to national needs such as vaccine production or infrastructure expansion. State-based institutions, including ministries of health, presidential offices and national regulatory authorities, have influenced project design and implementation, as seen in the local adaptation of Chinese infrastructure projects or the integration of vaccine donations into national rollout plans. Collective organisations like the AU, Africa CDC, and the AVATT have acted as platforms for continental agency, coordinating resources, setting strategic priorities and speaking

with one voice in global negotiations such as the TRIPS waiver. While less visible, non-state actors, including think tanks, researchers and advocacy networks, have somehow contributed to shaping Africa's health agenda and calling for more transparent, reciprocal partnerships. However, their full potential in holding actors accountable or shaping narratives remains underutilised.

These dimensions of agency often work together, rather than in isolation. During COVID-19, for instance, AVATT's ability to secure vaccines depended not only on its continental mandate but also on the technical expertise of national health institutions and the political commitment of individual governments. This illustrates that agency is spread across different levels of Africa's health governance system, rather than concentrated in a single body. Africa's creation of AVATT or its role in negotiating China-funded health centres shows that the continent can take initiative and shape outcomes, countering the stereotype of a passive or reactive actor. At the same time, this agency operates within clear limits. Power, finance and technology remain unevenly distributed in the global system, meaning Africa's influence is always conditional. Agency, then, is best understood as negotiated, an ongoing effort to make strategic choices within constrained circumstances. While the idea of African agency in international affairs is sometimes oversimplified, a more thorough analysis shows that African states and actors play a complex and dynamic role in the international arena, interacting with global powers in a variety of ways as both participants and important influencers in some fields, as demonstrated here.

Here, constructivism enriches the analysis by revealing how shared norms, identities and narratives shape both the possibilities and the limits of agency. China's engagement in African health is not only strategic but symbolic, anchored in the language of South–South cooperation, postcolonial solidarity and mutual development. China's repeated references to 'all-weather friendship' and 'shared destiny' resonate with African narratives of historical marginalisation and aspirations for self-reliance. This ideational framing has enabled Africa to demand more equitable partnerships, invoking moral arguments rather than purely transactional ones. For instance, the appeal for vaccine equity was not

framed as charity but as a right grounded in shared norms of justice, solidarity and health as a global public good.

However, as constructivism reminds us, identity is not always symmetrical. While Africa often appears in global discourse as vulnerable, dependent and reactive, China presents itself as a capable and benevolent partner, even as it continues to grow into a global power whose motives are not purely altruistic. Differences in priorities can thus create tension. China often focuses on high-profile hospital projects to showcase its capabilities and influence, while African leaders may prefer more affordable, decentralised health systems and investments in local capacity. These mismatched preferences tell us something about deeper political and values-based differences, even within a shared Global South context.

Shared norms still offer room for strategic collaboration, and constructivism allows us to see that power is not only material but also ideational, normative and discursive. Therefore, by claiming space within Global South diplomacy and asserting its priorities through well-defined strategies and institutions, Africa is beginning to reshape the terms of engagement – and not only with China. Africa's ability to build common positions within platforms like the G77 and NAM, such as around TRIPS waivers, show how solidarity can be used to advance diplomatic goals. In this way, African health diplomacy reflects both agency and shared values. It's not only about pursuing national interests but also about promoting justice, equity and collective responsibility. This dual lens, agency and constructivism, helps us understand why Africa's engagement with China, though historically present, is not simply a reaction to donor withdrawal or infrastructure needs. It is also a discursive and strategic project, in which African actors are actively shaping the meaning, priorities and practices of global health cooperation within a contested geopolitical landscape.

As Africa nears the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs, the continent remains significantly off-track in meeting SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Deep structural inequalities both within and beyond Africa continue to undermine efforts to build resilient, accessible and affordable health systems. Traditional donors are withdrawing or redirecting aid, and global health governance is increasingly marked by geopolitical contestation. In this context, China continues to position

itself as Africa's all-weather friend, and a significant health partner, offering both resources and symbolic support under the banner of South–South solidarity.

Nonetheless, structural asymmetries, especially in financing, technological capacity, and agenda-setting power, continue to be a hindrance. Identity gaps between Africa's portrayal as vulnerable and China's self-image as capable and generous can also lead to misaligned priorities. For instance, as has been highlighted, infrastructure-heavy aid may not always match Africa's long-term needs for health workforce development, systems strengthening and primary care investment. And this is why African agency matters for SDG 3. It is the key mechanism through which Africa can negotiate the terms of engagement, advocate for deeper and fairer cooperation, and ensure that partnerships, however asymmetrical, serve the continent's people and health priorities. It's also important to state that, with China, as with any other external actor, Africa must move from symbolic participation to strategic leadership, not only in forums but in implementation, too.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

This chapter has argued that Africa is not a passive recipient of Chinese global health diplomacy. Through institutions like the Africa CDC, multilateral campaigns such as the TRIPS waiver negotiations, and continent-wide vaccine procurement efforts, African actors have exercised agency that is multi-level, strategic and ideational. Drawing on Brown's (2012) framework, the chapter demonstrated how African states, regional institutions, and even emerging non-state actors, shape not simply absorb international health cooperation. At the same time, a constructivist lens revealed how norms, identities and narratives shape Africa–China interactions. China's positioning as a 'developing country partner' and Africa's invocation of justice, equity and shared postcolonial identity reflect the ideational underpinnings of this partnership.

To better leverage Africa–China health cooperation for SDG 3, African actors should prioritise five key actions: strengthening continental health diplomacy through AU-led coordination; ensuring implementation and

accountability mechanisms within South–South platforms like FOCAC and the G77; deepening investment in health sovereignty through local pharmaceutical production and technology transfer; diversifying partnerships beyond China to avoid dependency and enhance bargaining power; and actively engaging non-state actors, including civil society, academia and the media to support evidence-based advocacy and monitor progress. Together, these measures can enhance African agency, align partnerships with long-term health goals and contribute meaningfully to the continent's pursuit of SDG 3.

Africa's health future will not be determined solely by donor generosity or external alignment. It will depend on how effectively African actors mobilise their own resources, institutions and ideas. The pursuit of SDG 3 is not just a technocratic goal. It is a test of Africa's ability to lead within a rapidly changing global health order. The task now is to sustain and expand the forms of agency already in motion, so that cooperation is not only strategic and symbolic, but truly transformational.

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1 *https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/04/5-futures-for-global-aid/*
2 See Communique of NAM on Covid vaccine access *https://namazerbaijan.org/pdf/commnique_on_covid-19_vaccines_final.pdf*
3 Africa CDC Regional Coordination Centres *https://africacdc.org/regional-collaborating-centres/*

CHAPTER 9

The Impact of African Cultural Diplomacy in Shaping Socio-political Relations within the Global South

Rabecca Kavithe Ndeto
University of Nairobi, Kenya

Introduction

Cultural diplomacy is a subject that has recently received a lot of attention across the world. The subject is becoming increasingly topical in Africa and the Global South. The African continent is home to various ethnic groups and cultures, thus there is a need to understand the role of cultural diplomacy in shaping the socio-political relations of the different African countries, and as a means of engaging in international discourse in relation to the Global South. Recently, Africa has achieved a number of milestones when it comes to practising cultural diplomacy, which has hugely influenced social, economic and political changes within the continent.

The phrase 'cultural diplomacy' refers to a set of activities, programmes or initiatives designed by countries or states, with the help of various actors, as a way of improving the country's or region's foreign policy and international relations. It includes cultural events like language exchange programmes – established at a local, national and continental level with the aim of creating and building relations between different countries or regions – and strengthening ties across the globe through exchanging ideas, values, beliefs and traditions as a way of developing a mutual understanding between them (Njiru 2016). The key objective of cultural diplomacy is to improve international relations and the foreign policies of the country or region. By practicing cultural diplomacy, the continent or state seeks to promote a positive image to other countries or regions as a way of obtaining favourable public opinion in order to achieve its specific

policy goals.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, culture has played a vital role in developing relations between different countries and continents, and it has hence been adopted into foreign policy structures (Pine 2020). This has led to the emergence of the term 'soft power', which highlights the ability of a state to use its 'beliefs, attractiveness, diversity and language' as a key tool for persuasion towards achievement of set foreign policy goals. Soft power is the opposite of the term 'hard power', which refers to the ability to change what other countries do or operate (Nye 2008). Therefore, soft power involves the use of intangible resources or features like ideologies and culture to attract other foreign powers. A country's soft power operates on different pillars that include its political system and values, culture and overall foreign policy. It is important to understand that soft power is not something new, but rather a development of imperialism. Soft power means that a country should turn its culture into a collective social practice that is increasingly important and influential in the international relations (IR) arena. According to the concept of soft power, when efficiently explored, culture can be a strategic resource in terms of political governance, development and global diplomacy. Therefore, culture emerges as an indispensable factor in social cohesion, peace, development and dialogue between people of different nationalities.

This chapter provides an overview of the importance of cultural diplomacy in international relations, and establishes the background for an examination of African cultural diplomacy within the Global South paradigm. The chapter also provides an overview of goals, and the organisational framework of the analysis.

A subsequent section on historical context explores the origins of African cultural diplomacy historically, following its development from precolonial exchanges to modern methods. The chapter draws attention to significant academic pursuits, artistic movements and cultural exchanges that have influenced African identity and changed sociopolitical dynamics in the Global South.

Leveraging African arts and media for cultural soft power: The researcher examined how African nations use their rich cultural heritage

– which includes music, literature, film and visual arts – as instruments of soft power in the Global South. The research discusses the complexities of the binaries reflected in how other actors perceive the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South. The chapter looks at successful cultural projects and evaluates how they promote mutual understanding, solidarity and cooperation among the countries of the Global South. Examples of these initiatives include film festivals, literary exchanges and music collaborations.

A later section on diaspora engagement and cultural bridges examines the role of diasporic communities in promoting African culture and values within the Global South, with a focus on the African diaspora. It looks at topics such as community outreach programmes, cultural festivals and heritage preservation projects and evaluates how they help different diasporic people build shared identities and stronger sociopolitical relationships.

The researcher examines the use of cultural diplomacy by African regional organisations, such as the African Union (AU) and regional economic communities, to further the goals of regional integration in the Global South. The section discusses programmes that support language variety, cross-cultural understanding and cultural interchange among Member States and evaluates how well they contribute to regional solidarity and collaboration.

Opportunities and obstacles: The last section addresses the opportunities and obstacles that African cultural diplomacy faces in influencing sociopolitical ties in the Global South. The section lists challenges like linguistic hurdles, financial limitations and cultural preconceptions, but also identifies ways to innovate, work together and form strategic alliances to get past these issues and push African cultural diplomacy abroad.

The chapter ends with a conclusion which also highlights the importance of African cultural diplomacy as a catalyst for developing sociopolitical ties within the Global South. It emphasises how crucial it is to keep funding cultural exchange programmes and spreading African cultural values in order to strengthen the unity, respect and collaboration of the nations of the Global South.

Approaches of Studying Global South

Case studies

The researcher selected multiple case studies of African cultural diplomacy initiatives within the Global South. These case studies represent diverse geographical regions, cultural contexts and types of cultural exchange activities. Examples include cultural festivals, artistic collaborations, diaspora engagement programmes and regional integration initiatives. In addition, the scholar conducted in-depth qualitative analysis of each case study, employing methods such as content analysis, thematic coding and comparative analysis to identify patterns, trends and factors influencing the impact of African cultural diplomacy on socio-political relations.

Interviews and surveys

The scholar conducted semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in African cultural diplomacy initiatives, including government officials, cultural policymakers, artists, cultural diplomats and members of diasporic communities. Additionally, the researcher administered surveys to participants and audiences of cultural events to gather quantitative data on perceptions, attitudes and experiences related to African cultural diplomacy and its impact on socio-political relations within the Global South.

Documentary analysis

The author analyses official documents, policy statements, speeches and media coverage related to African cultural diplomacy initiatives and their reception within the Global South. This involves examining primary sources of information to understand the objectives, strategies and outcomes of cultural diplomacy efforts, as well as public discourse surrounding these initiatives.

Quantitative data analysis

This chapter utilised statistical analysis techniques to analyse survey data and identify correlations, trends and patterns related to the impact of African cultural diplomacy on socio-political relations within the Global South. This may involve employing descriptive statistics, regression analysis and factor analysis to explore relationships between variables such as cultural exchange activities, public perceptions and policy outcomes.

Ethical considerations

The researcher adhered to ethical guidelines throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent from participants, protecting confidentiality and respecting cultural sensitivities, as well as remaining sensitive to the potential impact of the research on stakeholders and communities involved in African cultural diplomacy initiatives. The necessary measures were taken to mitigate any potential risks or harms.

Historical analysis of African diplomacy

In order to understand the concept of cultural diplomacy in Africa, it is vital to explore and acknowledge the historical perspective on diplomacy in Africa. Current diplomacy in Africa revolves around the idea of equality, justice and democracy as the key towards strengthening international relations (Akokpari 2016). Cultural diplomacy includes the imperative need for socio-economic development and peace encapsulated in the ideas of solidarity, unity and integration of the various African countries. According to Eiguedo-Okoeguale (2022), the perspective of diplomacy in Africa is based on the history of colonisation and marginalisation of the African people by the rest of the world, especially former colonisers. Moreover, the concept of African diplomacy, not only characterised by the colonial history and other negative encounters, and relationship with the western world, but it also incorporates the traditional values and beliefs of the African people. This includes respect for African beliefs, authority and traditions, where the key emphasis is on African communities and not

individuals. For example, the *ubuntu* culture of Southern Africa and the *harambee* ('coming together') culture of East Africa (Chege 2021).

Precolonial and colonial African diplomacy

It is quite difficult to trace the origin of African diplomacy, despite the continent being known as the 'Original home of humankind'. However, ancient history suggests that modern trade relations between various countries and regions in Africa continued to mirror diplomatic practices before the colonial era. Ancient Egypt's practices are an example of precolonial African diplomacy (Sagheer 2022). Through political alliances, peaceful conflict resolutions and trade agreements, Egypt remains connected with the neighbouring countries. Additionally, migration and trade alliances in Central and Southern Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are further examples of precolonial practices that represent African diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy scholars need to understand that precolonial African diplomacy was important to the continent's growing relations with traders from other parts of the world, such as Asia.

The first instances of colonialism in Africa occurred in North Africa. Around 1500 BCE, maritime exploration of the northern part of Africa by the Greeks and Romans led to the first foreign occupations of Africa. This led to the emergence of the longest-running known diplomatic relations of the modern world: those between Greece and North Africa countries like Tunisia. Thereafter, the penetration of the region by the Ottoman Empire led to the emergence of a Muslim culture in Africa. During the seventeenth century, Arabs had occupied a huge part of North Africa and East Africa. This was done using a more organised structure, which led to the imprinting of Islamic cultural ties and diplomatic ties between Africa and the Far West. The collective cultural and religious jurisprudence has so far aided in the development of diplomatic ties between the Sahel and Sahara regions and the Arab World countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which has continued even in the contemporary era.

European colonisation in Africa left a profound and permanent impact on the continent's diplomacy and political development. The scramble

for and partition of Africa by the Europeans led to the division of Africa and the creation of illogical boundaries. This led to the destruction of the social, cultural and political cohesion of Africa, interfering with the diplomatic structure of the continent. The inter-state relations of African countries thus became an extension of the diplomatic relations of the European colonial powers.

Colonisation in Africa lasted for a long period compared to other continents, with the result that European diplomatic policy continues to exert powerful influence across the continent, despite most of its countries gaining sovereignty. Most African countries adopted the colonial language after gaining independence, which has hugely affected the continent's overall diplomatic and international relations. During the postcolonial period, African states had little or limited experience in matters of foreign policy and infrastructure development, and inadequate resources and bureaucratic understanding to venture into the world of diplomacy. Ethnicity and association with the top elites influenced the appointment of the first batch of diplomats by the new African governments. It is important to understand that most African states were characterised by dictatorial and militarised governments, which were not naturally inclined towards the art of international diplomacy. Matters of efficacy in international relations in Africa faced several difficulties due to authoritarian states. Therefore, most democratic governments on the continent focused on maximising diplomatic relations by engaging in multilateral diplomatic opportunities, including adopting cultural diplomacy as a key to maximising socio-economic and political development in the region.

African cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy plays a huge role in the scope of contemporary international relations, as it acts as a bridge between different regions or countries characterised by diverse and complex cultural beliefs, values and traditions. The concept of cultural diplomacy has emerged in recent years due to the expansion of cultural boundaries across the globe, which has made the topic indispensable to the conveying of overall cultural values

and creation of understanding of global cultural dynamics. Therefore, African cultural diplomacy is based on the ideology of facilitating cross-cultural dialogues and relations beyond the African continent. AU Member States have orchestrated several policies and ideas based on using culture as a form of attraction, especially in the Global South (Ballestrin 2020). The use of cultural diplomacy in Africa is said to be as old as ancient civilisation (Taylor 2018). The existence of cultural diplomacy in ancient Africa is evidenced by interactions between ancient traders, missionaries, explorers, artists and scholars specifically known to foster relationships through cultural exchanges. According to researchers, cultural diplomacy functions by interacting through expressions of life within the foreign policy of a nation or continent (Enaifoghe and Makhutla 2020). This leads to substantial investment and development in the region (Taylor 2018). Huda and Muchatuta (2022) state that African cultural diplomacy is, however, associated with various challenges, such as imbalanced soft power dynamics between Africa and developed countries across the world. However, cultural diplomacy in Africa contributes to vast socio-economic and political development, including boosting educational capacity and development and improving the living conditions of the people of Africa.

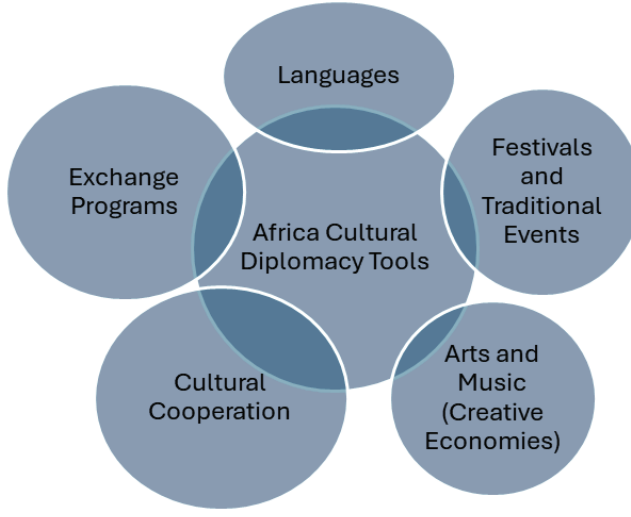


Figure 9.1: Tools of African Cultural Diplomacy.

Africa possesses a long and deep-rooted cultural heritage, which provides a strong foundation for attaining sustainable continental socio-economic development and prosperity. In the past few years, development in African nations has been immense and has shown success due to the varied efforts of governments and non-government institutions to create strong foreign relations as a way of attracting investors. Africa has achieved this by creating cultural exchange programmes and initiatives that aids successful cooperation within and beyond the region. Increased cooperation is the key to Africa's economic growth and development.

Countries in the Global North continue to dominate the international relations space by using cultural diplomacy. In a globalised world economy, most countries focus on the battle of who has what and gets what, how and when. This means that most countries or continents struggle to gain a better position as a way of achieving social, economic and political development. Therefore, African cultural diplomacy is a vital dimension of the overall geopolitics of the continent and positioning in the Global South. Studies suggest that Global North countries have been able to sell themselves to the rest of the world using cultural diplomacy initiatives like education exchange programmes. Therefore, African cultural diplomacy embrace the art of encouraging cultural appreciation to enhance Africa's visibility across the world.

To understand the impact of cultural diplomacy in Africa, it is vital to explore the concept from a philosophical perspective rather than as a multi-disciplinary tool. Currently, cultural diplomacy in Africa remains a political tool in most cases used to create political division across countries. This has led to a question surrounding how Africa plans to leverage its diverse and rich heritage as a tool for selling its image to the world.

Another limitation affecting African cultural diplomacy initiatives is that the West has long and successfully dominated the art of propaganda in cultural diplomacy. The Europeans succeeded in presenting their languages and values to be the standard for any civilised nation, while projecting African culture as representing the opposite. Europeans, through colonisation and the use of cultural diplomacy, hugely influence the people of Africa, leading to most African rejecting their indigenous

cultural practices and beliefs. This has created a situation in which African countries and people tend to become agents used in promoting Western culture, a system that has permeated every facet of African life, including religion, language, food, education and dress code. For instance, according to Western culture, some traditional African ways of worship translate to the use of magic and witchcraft. On the other hand, Western culture holds Christianity in high esteem. Cultural diplomacy is about informing others with an aim of changing their perspective, which scholars view as impression management. This began during the era of colonisation and continues today.

At a continental level, culture has been a tool used to deepen cooperation and collaboration among the diverse peoples of Africa. It has also helped strengthen cooperation in other policy areas of the various AU Member States. *Ubuntu* and *harambee* inspired the concept of African unity. The AU recognises culture as a critical element for mobilising its people around common values, such as thus the ideology of Pan-Africanism. The 2006 Charter of African Cultural Renaissance, which the AU developed, recognises culture as a key tool in enhancing diplomatic ties within and beyond the region. The organisation has adopted several initiatives, such as the AU Year of Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want in 2021, as a manifestation of the use of African cultural diplomacy to strengthen cooperation in the Global South.

Within the continent, the AU increasingly and strategically adopts cultural diplomacy policies as part of foreign policy measures. The organisation has focused on enhancing cultural diplomacy as a key for promoting peace and fighting ethnic differences within the continent. The continent pursues these goals through open intracultural dialogue, thus strengthening the AU's foreign and security policies.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2022), African cultural diplomacy is a field that is increasingly attracting scholars across the world, as it involves the use of culture in promoting sustainable economic and socio-political development, peace, security and dialogue on the African continent. In Africa, cultural diplomacy is a tool for enhanced social inclusion, education and environmental sustainability. The AU's cultural diplomacy

strategy focuses on both promotion of the diverse African cultures beyond its borders and their use as drivers of policy change. This helps in valorising the continent's cultural assets through capacity building, research and sharing knowledge – which are the beacons of cooperation between Africa and the world.

African cultural diplomacy is known to help in the forming of strategic alliances, an added advantage given contemporary multicultural societies. This practice has fostered a stronger recognition of culture as a soft power, as most countries have shifted from public relations to value promotion as a way of positioning and attracting other key players in the international relations arena (Chatin 2019). Adoption of African cultural diplomacy has led to increased recognition of the diverse culture of AU Member States, as well as recognition of the historical and social legacies linked with the practices and beliefs of the people and communities within the African continent, thus leading to increased global recognition (Tran 2024).

However, despite the fact that African cultural diplomacy plays a vital role in the positioning and development of Africa across the globe, the ideology of cultural diplomacy polices is still in need of clear articulation across the overall foreign policy spectrum. Most African countries still do not have specific cultural diplomacy policies that highlight the responsibilities of the key institutions concerned with matters of cultural diplomacy, which are more likely to be beneficial to the national interests and enhance international cooperation. Therefore, most African countries must focus on fostering cultural diplomacy policies that explore and highlight the various challenges and opportunities associated with the incorporation of culture into diplomatic matters.

Social, political and economic relations in the Global South

In the recent past, the socio-economic and geopolitical upheavals of the Global South have been characterised by the general international relations across the world, including systemic geopolitical, social and economic issues among several countries, such as the relations between China and the United States. Examples such as the recent coups d'état in

West African countries, including Mali and Burkina Faso, and the ongoing civil conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), illustrate the extent to which international cooperation has become strained and highlight the need to rethink foreign relations in the Global South (Ezeogu 2022). The Global South is composed of developing countries, which are characterised as rife with conflicts and lacking economic advantage compared to the Global North (Benabdallah, Murillo-Zamora and Adetula 2017). However, recently the Global South has emerged as a key player in international relations, due to the emergence of various policies enhancing the positioning of the region across the globe (Grovogu 2011). For instance, countries like Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa (BRICS) have revolutionised the position of the Global South in various ways, which has led to increased socio-economic and political development of the region.

How socio-political initiatives are shaped by cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy acts as a way of using a nation's values and traditions in its foreign policy as a way of attracting investment and improving the country's foreign relations. According to Schoeman (2011), socio-political initiatives such as public diplomacy shape the cultural diplomatic policies of a country. Research indicates that culture is a vital tool in establishing and improving international relations, especially when incorporated into the socio-political and economic diplomacy of a country or continent (Saaida 2023). Therefore, there is a need to understand how socio-political initiatives shape the overall cultural diplomacy of a country or region. Various aspects of socio-politics, such as soft power, play a huge role in shaping a country's cultural diplomacy approach. Cultural diplomacy contributes to socio-political dimensions, as there exists an implicit motive of adding value and improving how others view the country or region. Cultural diplomacy is a tool known to assert the interests of various elites in the global political landscape. In the global world, socio-politics influences which country – and when and how each of these countries – gets what, and thus acts as an instrument for dominating foreign relations and diplomatic matters, especially between

the Global North and Global South. Thus, cultural diplomacy is just another dimension of socio-political matters, especially when it comes to the various countries' struggles to position themselves in the global world (Tella 2021).

The case study of Morocco is a strong example of the connection between socio-political initiatives and cultural diplomacy efforts in Africa. In recent years, Morocco's foreign policy has shifted beyond African borders but also focused on deepening its relationship with its continental neighbours within the Sahara region (Wüst and Nicolai 2022). This has been associated with the country's desire to widen and strengthen its overall social, political and economic influence beyond the African continent as a way of enhancing its overall foreign policy objectives and initiatives. In 2017, the Moroccan government strengthened its overall foreign policy by re-joining the African Union. This served as a way of repositioning itself as a key player or representative of the Western Sahara region. It also acted as a way of expanding knowledge about the country's cultural values and communities in the Global South arena. Morocco's updated strategy related to its cultural and public diplomacy has led to massive positive outcomes, such as enhanced investment opportunities and trade, stronger diplomatic relations and increased regional integration. Key principles guide Morocco's cultural diplomacy policy: solidarity, neighbourliness, and partnership within Africa and the Global South. The need to enhance and promote cooperation with its neighbours and establish its position in terms of development, security and peace matters drives Morocco's primary aim of enacting cultural diplomacy as part of its foreign affairs. The country's cultural diplomacy is geared towards positioning itself as a monarch within its territory.

Morocco's cultural diplomacy focuses on its history, traditions, education and religion.The Moroccan government has developed various socio-political initiatives, such as cultural centres, exhibitions and fairs, and sponsored activities abroad as a way of enhancing its influence across the globe. This highlights Morocco as a unique country with a rich and diverse cultural identity. Its political institutions have invested in religious diplomacy as a key to establishing strong economic and political relations across the globe. By embracing religious diplomacy, the country has been

able to enhance its profile across the Sahara and Sahel regions. These socio-political initiatives by Moroccan's government have enhanced its cultural diplomatic efforts by promoting Islam and using religion to enhance its positioning in the region.

Morocco uses socio-political initiatives such as festivals and other events to promote its cultural diplomacy. This has helped the country boost its diplomatic efforts by promoting its culture as a key to enhancing its overall visibility (Boutabssil et al. 2021). The Marrakech International Film Festival is a strong example of how festivals and events have enhanced Morocco's overall visibility. Moreover, the country has invested hugely in scientific and educational cooperation as part of its overall cultural diplomatic tactics. Most Moroccan universities practice educational cooperation with universities from abroad. The institutions' positioning helps attract other African scholars and establish Morocco's universities as leading institutions for scientific research on the African continent. Its cultural diplomacy strategy has helped the country boost its international reputation and ties, which helps create favourable policies that encourage international students to study in Morocco.

Cultural diplomacy in Morocco has been successful, since the country has also hugely invested in cultural infrastructure that promotes the capital city, Rabat, as a cultural hub. These efforts contributed to Rabat being designated the African Capital of Culture by United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (Zamorano 2016). The use of cultural diplomacy as a soft power has been beneficial for Morocco, as it has helped enhanced the country's visibility and reputation within and beyond Africa. The Moroccan monarchy and the government have worked hand in hand to strengthen the country's African identity, including through Morocco's return to the AU, which has facilitated the establishment of about 20 consulates of African states in the country.

Another example of how socio-political initiatives have led to successful cultural diplomacy is the case of China in Africa. Over the past few decades, Chinese lawmakers promoted China through the use of cultural diplomacy to increase its image and influence in Africa. Caruso (2020) justifies China's use of cultural diplomacy as a soft power towards developing countries in the Global South by saying it makes the country

shine culturally. The use of cultural diplomacy is evident in the several initiatives under way in Africa, including infrastructure development and free aid to African countries while respecting each one's sovereignty. China has hugely invested in the use of cultural power to gain influence, by raising awareness of its own cultures as well as what the other regions of the world mean to China and its people (Zhou, Barnes and Gustafsson 2022). China's use of cultural diplomacy in Africa has helped build positive sentiment about China's overall political and economic attractiveness. Cultural diplomacy in China–Africa relations has therefore helped strengthen cooperation between China and various African countries.

Cultural diplomacy and soft power

Cultural diplomacy has emerged as a vital component of foreign policy, especially in the Global South (Korir 2023). Most countries seek to develop and strengthen their soft power across the world and extend their overall influence across their borders. In Africa, cultural diplomacy has become a key tool for the continent to projects its ability and capacity when it comes to creating influence beyond its borders. Culture and cultural exchange programmes in Africa help establish and develop working relations between the AU Member States and beyond, thus subordinating the hard power aspects of politics, such as dictatorship and economic capability.

Cultural diplomacy as a soft power explores the use of exchanges to promote language, point of view and policies – in a way akin to narrating a story to the rest of the world (Wheeler 2013). Tsuprykova (2020) writes that culture as a soft power initiative used by countries to promote their national interests in the international arena has gained increasing attention in recent years. Most countries, especially in the Global South, have awakened to the idea that cultural diplomacy is a powerful tool that can be effective in advancing the national interest. Some countries, including Russia and China, have invested greatly in cultural diplomacy as an element of gaining soft power (Wamuya 2015). States achieve the soft power effect of cultural diplomacy through massive investment in international broadcasts and the establishing of cultural institutions in

different parts of the world, as a way of expanding their global influence. During the current global age, in which information remains powerful, states conduct cultural diplomacy through massive investment in international broadcasts and the establishing of cultural institutions in different parts of the world, influence and security beyond their borders, alongside the use of hard power strategies like military propaganda.

Cultural diplomacy tactics have enabled several countries to maintain traditional relations, by providing alternate forums where they are able to coordinate and shape their agendas and activities in the international system. Policy-makers acknowledge culture is a soft power tool when it comes to dominating the international relations arena more effectively when compared to economic and political powers. Most governments have acknowledged that their international image and perceptions remain the sole responsibility of the country itself, and cultural diplomatic initiatives are a vital part of maintaining and improving their global standing.

Overall, cultural relations between countries have proven to be a powerful factor in international relations, especially when countries seek to gain mutual benefit through cooperation and understanding. Cultural diplomacy is a critical component that fosters soft power, based on the ideology that mutual understanding is vital for building trust and tolerance. This allows governments to move forward and interact based on respect, with new collaboration grounded in interdependence and a clear understanding of the future challenges and threats that are likely to emerge.

Recommendations and conclusion

Secure policy consensus at regional level

Regional or continental-level consensus is the first step in establishing an overall diplomatic policy for Africa. This means that, for cultural diplomacy to be effective, African states must develop a policy consensus that promotes cultural diplomacy and soft power when it comes to building relations in and between Global South. Achieving such consensus requires

creating public institutions and designing business practices that reflect substantiated value, influence and impact in representing African cultural diplomacy and the continent's role in the socio-economic development of the Global South. Public and private institutions invest in cultural diplomacy through developing a portfolio for people to understand how it positively influences international relations. It is important to understand that most developing countries and regions often rely on cultural diplomacy initiatives and policies as a way of shaping or aligning their relations with other countries and attracting partners and investors – which should be the case for Africa. A critical example includes developing consensus policies, such as education exchange programmes, as an effective instrument that supports the implementation of a country's cultural diplomacy. Examples of effective cultural diplomacy initiatives include their use in developing the foreign relations between the United States and other continents. Through use of educational scholarships, the US has been able to create advantage and win favour among people across the world. Therefore, it is evident that Africa, for a long time, missed a powerful opportunity to embrace cultural diplomacy as key to supporting long-term foreign diplomatic interest.

Formalise states and interdepartmental cooperation

Cultural diplomacy is a foreign policy tool that is multi-faceted, which means it involves different institutions and departments, and both government and non-governmental agencies. This means that the core policy issues are cross-cutting with other diplomatic policies that might affect the overall foreign diplomacy of the region (Tamunomiegbam et al. 2023). Therefore, the African continent should work towards normalising and formalising intergovernmental and interdepartmental cooperation when it comes to cultural diplomacy, as a way of fostering a deep connection between the different institutions and the relevant foreign affairs departments. Cultural diplomacy in Africa is already being used effectively in countries like South Africa and Kenya. However, many African countries' foreign affairs departments remain wary of pursuing it as a major component of their overall foreign policy. This indicates a

need for such African countries to focus on developing a Memorandum of Understanding or local laws that would result in the formal integration of cultural diplomatic policies into the overall diplomatic policies of the state or continent. To begin with, cultural diplomacy policies should be designed in a way that they are handled by experts guided by each country's constitution. This will promote cooperate governance when it comes to developing intergovernmental relations between Africa and the Global South. By doing this, different countries will be able to direct their cultural diplomacy policy between the different foreign diplomacy departments.

The continent should focus on promoting African cultural diplomatic initiatives beyond Africa. Developing Africa's cultural diplomacy reach could enable the various countries to use that influence to promote their overall foreign policies and international relations. This can be achieved by establishing an African cultural diplomatic framework for the AU, which would then spearhead the overall efforts to developing the continent's foreign policies and ensure they align with overall Global South policies.

Develop a new or revised African cultural diplomacy policy

In order to extend the benefits of cultural diplomacy beyond intra-African relationships and boost the continent's position in the Global South, African countries must work towards developing a unique policy framework that enhances the concept of cultural diplomacy. This includes a high-level analysis of current foreign policies and legislation. According to the research, the concept of cultural diplomacy remains unfocused within most African countries' foreign policy, which has made it difficult to table issues regarding the promotion of African cultures beyond the continents' borders as a way of supporting Africa's diplomatic interests. Therefore, relevant policy is lacking within the overall African diplomatic corps. This suggests that the continent should re-think and re-explore existing foreign policy as a way of maximising Africa's soft power and potential in the IR field. The new or revised cultural diplomacy policies should be geared towards developing a commonly defined African identity based on national or continental interest. These policies must be designed

in a way that promotes a clear understanding of the past and present experiences of Africa as a continent in relation to cultural diplomacy, as well as the experience of the other countries in the Global South. This can be achieved through a collaborative process among the various African institutions, tasked with using culture as a tool for promoting the attractiveness of the various African countries. New or reformed policies must be developed in a way that they provide an alternative approach to 'business as usual' diplomatic strategy. The resulting African cultural diplomacy policies must focus on the promotion of the diverse African cultures, values and ideals in a way that will enhance Africa's influence and overall image abroad, and promote the continent's socio-economic development.

Create an appropriate institutional platform

Africa should develop an appropriate institutional platform that tackles matters of cultural diplomacy. Currently, there is no governmental or non-governmental body that is designed to handle cultural diplomacy and diplomatic matters in Africa. This has made it difficult to formulate and implement African cultural diplomacy policies and initiatives. The continent has invested significant amounts in developing international relations with other countries. However, there is limited information available on cultural diplomacy approaches. Therefore, there is a need to develop an appropriate institutional platform to promote and handle matters related to cultural diplomacy in Africa.

Develop cultural diplomacy policy objectives and instruments

Africa's cultural diplomacy approaches are aimed at attaining a wide range of objectives, in line with the overall foreign policy goals of the continent, especially when it comes to positioning itself in the Global South. These primary objectives include advancing trade and economic development, developing mutually beneficial relationships and understanding through the use of cultural features such as art and music, and advancing the interests of Africa's people abroad. Its cultural diplomacy objectives are

pursued through initiatives such as educational and cultural exchange programmes, government scholarships, art festivals that support African exhibitions and cultural performances, and seminars and conferences that highlight African culture abroad. Cultural diplomacy also entails initiatives such as establishing cultural libraries and language centres, investing in publication and distribution of journal articles on African cultural diplomacy, and the use of digital and mass media like international TV programmes to promote African culture both within and beyond continental borders.

The use of the strategies and activities above will help Africa achieve its foreign policy goals, as they would help highlight a peaceful and prosperous Africa, thus aiding in the overall goals of public diplomacy in the IR arena. The AU should thus work to encourage long-term and sustainable relations between Member States and other countries through an array of both bilateral and multilateral cultural initiatives. This would attract foreign investment, boost the continent's creative economy and enhance its influence and international standing.

Conclusion

Cultural diplomacy is key to boosting Africa's socio-economic and political development in the Global South. Many countries across the globe have successfully adopted cultural diplomacy as part of their foreign diplomacy, leading to effective socio-economic and political development. Observably, cultural diplomacy has helped shape the complexities of the binaries reflected in how other actors perceive the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South. Cultural diplomacy helps in building strong and long-lasting relationships between the different countries and continents, as it is based on common beliefs, values and traditions. This has helped enhance overall diplomatic relations between the various stakeholders, which has in turn stimulated socio-economic growth with a key focus on the arts and creative economies of the continent.

Most African countries view their cultural values, beliefs, arts, music and language as their national heritage, which invokes a valuable public

good – but most in turn fail to invoke culture as an integrated tool for enhancing diplomatic relations. It is thus evident that the African continent lacks a clear and coherent policy on matters of cultural diplomacy. This has led to overdependence on government-sponsored foreign relations like public diplomacy actions as a way of portraying a more positive public image of African countries beyond the continent. However, this approach is not enough to deal with the issues affecting the positioning of the African continent in the Global South. Africa's soft power footprint in the region faces issues such as authoritative or military rule and massive corruption. Therefore, there is a need to incorporate cultural diplomacy as part of public diplomacy in Africa.

African cultural diplomacy policy that is sponsored by African governments is an important tool for enhancing the overall diplomatic efforts of the continent. It should thus be designed to focus on growing the reach of African culture, as a way of encouraging the trading of cultural products within the Global South and beyond. The chapter has shown that an enhanced continental approach to cultural diplomacy holds huge potential to enable Africa to support and widen its foreign policy objectives. Ultimately, cultural diplomacy is more than a strategic tool for socio-economic and political development of the continent and application of soft power – it is increasingly a vital part of any country's diplomatic strategies and tactics.

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CHAPTER 10

Digital Capitalism, Technological Determinism and the Emergence of Multipolar Powers

Job Allan Wefwafwa
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Kabaso Kabwe
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Introduction

There are many debates about how digital capitalism – as an ideology behind the globally networked economies (Schiller 2000) – and digital technologies such as social media (Castells 2018) have enabled the emergence of numerous economically powerful countries. Many scholars argue that digital capitalism is an ideology propagated by digital technologies (Curran and Freedman 2016; Fuchs 2009). As a result of this propagation, powerful countries now boast of political and economic influence across the globe. Some have formed economic and political alliances such as the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Wekesa 2023). Both the emerging global powers and the alliances have led to multipolar competition with the US for global interests. This chapter analyses how digital capitalism and digital technologies are facilitating the global realignment of world powers, creating a multipolar entity that competes with the idea of the United States of America (US) as a superpower. It argues, by drawing theoretically on McLuhan's (1994) theory of technological determinism, that recent political, economic and technological developments around the globe are driven by the technological gains within the emerging multipolar world order. In his theory of technological determinism, McLuhan (1994) argues that "a medium is a message", meaning that the medium used to convey

a message is as important as the message itself. For example, when the US as a superpower displays its latest military technology, it sends a clear message to other countries about its superpower status. Similarly, when BRICS member countries such as Russia and China display their military prowess, they send a message about their emerging power and their intention to challenge the superpower status of the US. With the latest technological advancements across the globe, the chapter argues that today it is difficult or even impossible to clearly identify a particular country as a superpower, as was the case with the Union of Soviet States of Russia (USSR), and later the US, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In other words, there is now greater contestation around the complexities of the binaries reflected in how other actors perceive the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South. We see that digital capitalism, an ideology that has led to the massive use of digital technologies – consisting of new media technologies such as social media – has enabled globally networked economies and politics. This makes the globe easily accessible in virtual terms, in what McLuhan (1994) conceptualised as "a global village" in his theory of technological determinism. To understand the concept of the global village in the African context, we can draw on Guy's (2012) observation that indigenous Africans had basic political units called village assemblies, where village members gathered and deliberated on issues affecting their lives. The village assemblies were presided over by the headmen, whose role was to convene and moderate the people's deliberations. Contrary to the writings of many Western anthropologists, African headmen did not have more power than the people, and they ruled only as long as the people wanted them to (Mbiti 1969). If the people did not want them, they had several ways of ending the chiefs' tenure. For example, the people could leave the village to form a new one, and crown a new headman of their choice. Such an action could leave the previous headman vulnerable to attack. It was akin to an indirect death sentence, because indigenous Africa consisted of predominantly predatory entities (Mbembe 2001). This meant that any of the headman's enemies could kill him to take the land. The people also had the option of carrying out a ritual murder of the headmen they no longer wanted (Matolino 2016).

This could happen if the people did not want to leave the village for some reason. Such reasons could include if the gods said so, or if the village land they had was particularly productive and they did not want to leave.

We see that we can analogise McLuhan's (1994) concept of the global village with today's social media space, which we can compare with the indigenous African village assemblies. For example, both social media and village assemblies provide space for people to express their views on all issues that affect their lives. All over the world, people are using social media to stand up for their democratic rights and express their opinions on issues that affect their lives. This was the case with the Arab Spring in 2011 and the Gen-Z-led protests in Kenya in 2024. Similarly, countries perceived by established powers as 'smaller', such as India, China and South Africa, are using the ideologies of digital capitalism and digital technologies to force the perceived superpower – the US – to pay attention to the economic and political interests of these 'smaller' countries. This is made possible by the interconnectedness of countries' economic interests and activities, which was referred to earlier as 'the globally networked economy'. As a result, the networked economy has the net effect of creating larger economies in the countries perceived as smaller. For example, the US has embraced offshore manufacturing, where the production processes of US companies are exported to emerging economies such as Vietnam, China, India and Indonesia for cheap labour. Billion-dollar industries in the US, such as fashion and film, are heavily dependent on these populous countries for cheap labour and marketing. The emerging economies are also forging the aforementioned alliances, such as BRICS, which further consolidate their economic power to compete effectively with the US superpower. This study analyses how digital capitalism and digital technologies are influencing the global realignment of world powers, creating a multipolar entity that effectively competes with the US as a superpower. It is guided by the research question: 'How do digital capitalism and digital technologies influence the global realignments within the world powers competing with the US superpower status?' The chapter is divided into four sections: introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and conclusion.

Digital capitalism, technologies and US superiority

This section anchors the conceptualisation of the chapter on two poles: technology and multipolarity. Technology here means both the technology of digital capitalism and new media technologies such as social media. Fuchs (2009) sees digital capitalism in Marxian terms, in the broad ontological, epistemological and axiological sense, as an economic mode embedded in the antagonistic capitalist society. These antagonisms also manifest in international relations, particularly in the tensions between emerging powers and the existing superpower (Fuchs 2009). These relations potentially allow the competing countries to 'dissolve exploitation and oppression in society' (Fuchs 2009: 74–75). For example, the competition between the US and other emerging global powers, including the BRICS countries, results in the exploitation of the less dominant global actors, such as the majority of African countries. The concept of digital capitalism was developed by Schiller (2000) in an attempt to explore the link between the spread of new computer and satellite technologies and the emergence of new capitalist modes of production and consumption. These capitalist modes are inherently based on the politics of dispossession, corporate control and the exploitation of immaterial labour.

The original intention of digital technologies was that they would be used by innovative individuals and groups to come up with ways to meet their needs (Curran and Freedman 2016). However, unscrupulous individuals and groups, including countries, infiltrate the innovations and corrupt them to their advantage (Brisset-Foucault 2018). For example, some people use the digital technologies for disinformation and misinformation, and to their own advantage. The unscrupulous groups are what this chapter calls 'digital capitalists', which includes the US, the BRICS countries and other groupings. These entities own the capitalist modes supported by the technologies of digital capitalism, especially computer and satellite technologies. These modes have enabled the shrinking of geographical space, where the traditional borders of countries no longer prevent people from engaging in economic and political activities. This includes allegations of manipulation of vote tallies, as we

saw with allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election. We have seen Cambridge Analytica, a software company from the UK, interfere in the Kenyan elections in 2013 and 2017 (Wefwafwa et al. 2025). The technologies of digital capitalism have made space and time immaterial to the organisation of human experience (Barassi 2016). Both the creative and the unscrupulous individuals and groups misuse the digital capitalism technologies, affecting the various countries they target, regardless of their geographical distance.

Globally networked economies were first critiqued by autonomous Marxists after a critical re-reading of Marx. Feenberg (2013) argues that technologies, including the digital capitalism technologies, are not neutral, but rather embody specific values that are shaped and used by those in power, to maintain their social, economic, political and ideological positions. Thus, we see the emerging economies and the US misusing digital capitalist technologies, including social media, for political mileage through misinformation and disinformation. The smaller economies, like Kenya, are lured by the multipolar players and the US to adopt the digital capitalist technologies. This enables them to establish economic relations with the smaller countries by supplying the technologies that support digital capitalism. These relations give the multipolar powers and the US immense social power, which is exercised over the smaller countries, especially in Africa. For example, the Kenyan government procures the technologies of digital capitalism from the multipolar powers such as China, the United Kingdom (UK) and the US. The technology for registering Kenyan citizens under Huduma Namba – Kenya's former national digital ID system – is an ideology of the multipolar powers, from where we see the idea of surveillance of the Kenyan citizens by the foreign powers who are funding the Kenyan economy through various initiatives including direct foreign aid (Wefwafwa et al 2025). Foucault (1977) examined the operation of power through Bentham's design of the circular prison, the Panopticon, arguing that its principles extend beyond the prison itself and function ideologically as a mechanism for governing society. We see that the multipolar powers and the US have global interests – economic and political – in the smaller countries. They use the technologies of digital capitalism to create conformity, which in

Foucault's thinking, make the smaller countries think and act in a certain way for fear of being denied foreign aid. We can metaphorically use Foucault's (1977) power trajectory on Kenya's Huduma Namba, thanks to which the Kenyan government, the multipolar powers and the US now have easy access to the digital records of the Kenyan people. This allows them to make political and economic decisions based on their interests. For example, the British company Cambridge Analytica used the Kenyan government's data to shape the country's electoral politics in a way that could benefit the UK economically and politically.

In addition to the misuse of digital capitalism technologies by the multipolar economies, the US and the smaller countries, there are some positive effects that arise from it. For example, there is the emergence and flourishing of the globally networked economies across countries, away from the 'saturated' national markets of the 1970s (Barassi 2016: 5). During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2021, the technologies of digital capitalism allowed people across the globe to continue to work remotely, keeping physical distance to minimise infections. People across the globe held virtual meetings, conducted global business, carried out regular work tasks from home and, most importantly, were paid electronically, regardless of the countries in which they worked. This was despite the challenges created by the new working environments, including physical isolation from colleagues and the potential for invasion of privacy, particularly by supervisors.

Ordinary people and small countries (mis)use digital technologies to advance their own interests, or to undermine the interests of multipolar powers and superpowers. For example, the people of Kenya observed that Cambridge Analytica interfered in the country's 2017 elections, so they (mis)used social media to gather evidence of electoral malpractice, which they presented to their Supreme Court, resulting in the annulment of the presidential elections. Globally, people (mis)used social media technologies to demand social justice during the #BlackLivesMatter protests in the US, as a form of resistance to the status quo (Bosch et al. 2020). Some Autonomous Marxists draw on Foucault's (1978) consideration that 'where there is power, there is resistance' to argue that individuals and groups (mis)use technologies as a means of resisting

exploitation and oppression, in what is referred to as 'technological power relations' (Mithun et al. 2016: 95). The postphenomenologists argue that adaptive and culturally influenced people interact with technologies and find new uses to solve existing problems (Ihde 2009; Lazzarato 2004; Negri 2008; Verbeek 2012). They believe that digital capitalist technologies enter society as a phenomenon and cause phenomenological societal changes without the influence of the aforementioned unscrupulous individuals. They argue that if the societal change brought about by digital capitalism technologies is negative, then people would not adapt to it, and it would not be culturally accepted. This implies that the technology is phenomenologically occurring without human intervention. However, Mouffe (2019) questions the postphenomenological stance that portrays social problems as solvable by such a simplistic singular logic.

Curran and Freeman (2016) call for greater reflection on what role we should assign to the technologies of digital capitalism, arguing that despite society's initial hopes for information and communication technologies (ICT), not all have been achieved. Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web (WWW) – on which digital technology sits – with humanitarian intentions (Curran and Freeman 2016). However, the multipolar powers, the US superpower and smaller countries misuse the technologies for their interests. Globally, the technologies of digital capitalism are misused to perpetuate self-interest – economic and political – including surveillance of citizens, competition among countries, unwarranted online marketing and online scam activities. McLuhan's (1994) theory of technological determinism suggests that the use of digital capitalist technologies is due to the cultural adaptation of technologies in society. A society with many vices would adopt the technology to do evil, while a society with good morals would adopt it to do good. Therefore, we see that the emerging countries intend to usurp the superpower status of the US. The use of the technologies of digital capitalism by these countries is intended to deprive the US of its power, as evidenced by the US' allegations that Russia interfered in its 2016 presidential elections as a 'challenge' to the US' superpower status.

Theoretical anchorage

Technological determinism, digital capitalism and superpower status

This chapter uses the notion of technological determinism to explain how the technologies of digital information capitalism are influencing the global realignment of world powers, creating a multipolar entity that is challenging the US as a superpower. The notion was first theorised by the sociologist Veblen (1857–1929) to explain how technology determines the development of social structure and cultural values (Carey 1967). Later, in the 1960s, McLuhan (1994), influenced by Innis (1894–1952), popularised the notion in his 'medium theory' (Carey 1967). The notion romanticises the idea that information vessels are a dominant force that must be understood to know how the media influence society and culture. McLuhan (1994) famously stated that 'the medium is the message'. This means that different information vessels differ not only in terms of content but also in how they evoke and modify thoughts and senses. The statement focuses on the characteristics of information carriers rather than what they convey or how information is received. The vessels of information in this case are the newspaper, radio, television or social media, and all other channels of communication. McLuhan (1994) argues that the vessels of information, other than the content they convey, influence individuals, societies and countries. People adapt to their environment through a particular balance of the senses, and the dominant medium of each era reshapes that sensory ratio, influencing how perception is formed. We can contextualise this through Wefwafwa's (2015) discussion of how the people of Kenya adapted FM vernacular radio to reflect their sense of civic duty, resulting in allegations of vote-rigging and violence during the 2007–2008 presidential elections.

We can illustrate how the 'sense of ratio' affects perception by using the idea of people's perception of BRICS and the US in terms of economic and political power. The media messages from the tools of digital capitalism, including social media, awakened people's sense of ratio in different ways. For example, people's (mis)use of the media to create perceptions about countries' military power depends on how the media awakens their senses.

BRICS countries such as China would use their snake festival coverage to project their 'mighty' power to their citizens and the world. Brazil would use its samba festivals to generate media content that portrays its self-sufficiency, contentment and power in the region and the world at large.

Different social media platforms, such as X, Facebook and TikTok, awaken different senses in different people around the world (Aldardasawi 2017). For example, Facebook aims at an amorphous mass anonymity of users whose senses are awakened (see McLuhan 1994). This means that social media users choose the medium that best awakens their senses according to their communication needs. In the case of the BRICS countries, their communicative needs are to project themselves as emerging powers that are stronger than the US (Aldardasawi 2017). Social media messages can, of course, be cross-posted on different platforms, with the messages moving from Facebook to X to WhatsApp to Instagram and to YouTube, generating different responses along the way. Let's say, for example, that screenshots of an X post are shared on Facebook and TikTok, generating different emotions and debates. In this case, the shared screenshots are not easily authenticated and cannot be easily traced back to the original message creator. This provides a conducive environment for those who misuse the technologies to generate controversial messages, especially about the superpower status of the US and competitors such as the BRICS countries.

Cross-posting allows social media messages to reach mainstream media such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Cable News Network (CNN). Using McLuhan's (1994) response to critics of his book *Prophecy*, we see that the mainstream media are reinventing themselves to complement social media rather than compete with it. McLuhan's (1994) prophecy is often cited as an example of technological determinism, in which he suggests that new technologies would eventually displace the book publishing process. Critics argued that McLuhan was wrong, because the technological development of the printing press allowed more books to be printed and their summarised versions shared on social media to maximise reach. Scholars acknowledge that the fact that more books were being printed than ever before, and social media used as part of the dissemination process shows that the traditional culture

of book publishing died. Thus, McLuhan (1984:82) had envisioned the high-tech printing press that would disrupt the existing print culture, in what he called the 'killing of the book publishing industry'.

When applied to BRICS and the US' superpower status, McLuhan's (1994) book can be applied metaphorically in two ways: First, it can be applied to increasing freedom of expression and liberalisation around the world, which means governments no longer monopolise the media. This allows private entities to invest in the media, resulting in better-quality content from emerging private media with immense opportunities, such as X, Facebook and TikTok. The second metaphorical application is that traditional media culture, like book culture, is being abandoned because of ICT developments. ICT around the world has reinvented itself to awaken people's senses in a balanced way, as the technology of digital capitalism does. Almost all major TV channels, radio stations and newspapers have adopted new ICT technologies to enable online subscriptions that allow global access and payments. The culture, roles and processes of the traditional media have therefore died, as predicted by McLuhan. We see that the death of the traditional media culture has widened the space for inclusivity and participation of many actors, thereby distributing economic and political power across the globe. We can combine McLuhan's (1994) concept of sense awakening with traditional media to argue that the complementarity between social media and traditional media is (re)awakening the sense of surveillance within the global powers. The US is constantly using surveillance technologies on the emerging powers, who are also surveilling the US. The global powers have sections and departments that are well-funded to ensure that they get information from each other about the technologies.

Methodology

The chapter used content analysis and observation to analyse how the technologies of digital capitalism are influencing the global realignment of world powers, creating a multipolar entity that challenges the US as a superpower. It drew on existing literature and social media posts to identify how digital capitalism has enabled the growing influence of emerging

economies. The literature, social media, author observations and lived experiences could not be meaningfully expressed in numerical terms. The authors collected and analysed the literature on how digital capitalism is influencing global realignments within world powers, creating a multipolar entity that competes with the US as a superpower. To obtain current literature, they attended and participated in international conferences on digital capitalism, emerging powers and superpower status. They also observed the media coverage on how digital capitalism enhances and/or limits the emerging powers and the superpower status. This took place between November 2024 and February 2025. The authors also followed the social media platforms of prominent political figures, including the former and current presidents of the US, and the presidents of Brazil, China, Russia, India and South Africa. The authors did not set any limits on when the leaders of the selected countries posted on social media. This is because the struggles for global power are ongoing, and setting limits would leave out some important perspectives that were posted years ago. The authors then organised the data sets into codes, which they analysed and interpreted. Social media is a relatively new platform, and the adoption of the platform by leaders for use in public communication is even more recent. Therefore, this methodological approach may seem somewhat unusual. However, the authors encouraged themselves with the thought that it is the courage to try new methodological approaches that leads to new rigorous methods. They purposively selected 100 posts and interacted with them as part of the research. The posts consisted of video clips, audio clips, and text. They thematically analysed the posts alongside observations and the literature review (see Kelle 2000). These provided the triangulation necessary to verify/validate the methods (Fielding 2012). The themes that emerged included the shrinking of the world into a global village, multipolarity/self-projection of emerging powers as equals to the US, economic strength of emerging powers and weakening of the US economy, and election-rigging and name tainting.

The authors have divided their observations into two parts: The first was the observation of online comments posted on the presidents' social media. The second was observing the presidents and the people during the news coverage. They observed the language and body language of

the people as they commented in the media on the issues surrounding the rising powers and the superpower. The observations were intended to provide a panoramic view of how people perceive the concepts of emerging powers and superpower status. The authors developed and used an observation schedule with guiding questions derived from the research question. The schedule also served as a coding sheet during the thematic analysis. The main challenge of the methodology was the different languages used by the presidents. The authors come from English-speaking countries, while almost all the BRICS countries do not speak English. They used basic language interpretation to understand the meanings and context.

Analysis

This section analyses how the technologies of digital capitalism are influencing the global realignments within the world powers, creating a multipolar entity that challenges the US as a superpower. The authors attempt to analyse the global events from an Afrocentric perspective to offer the perspectives that the authors consider to be African, even though they may not be the most popular (see Busia 1967; Guy 2012). The intention here is to offer an alternative view away from mainstream thinking. The chapter informs us about the Afrocentric perspectives on how digital capitalism enables the emergence of multipolar powers in the world. The Afrocentric perspectives are pursued by comparing the technologies of digital capitalism with indigenous African practices.

The shrinking of the world into a global village

From the literature reviewed in this chapter, the framework adopted, and the observations made, the authors see that digital capitalism has enabled the globe to appear as a metaphorical village (McLuhan 1994). McLuhan theorised that technology could make the world seem like a village, because we could know simultaneously what was happening in all corners of the world. Today we see that a single event in one corner of the globe, such as the attempted assassination of then-US presidential candidate

Donald Trump and his subsequent re-election as US president, instantly captures everyone's attention. We saw world leaders sending messages of goodwill – and, later, congratulations to Trump on his election as president. Perceptibly, we see that world leaders also tried to align the interests of their countries with the US, to establish bilateral relations in economic and political fields. But we also see that world leaders have been careful not to recognise the US as a superpower. Rather, they presented an image of an equal partner with whom they were interested in working. For example, during the period after the attempt on Trump's life, Russian President Vladimir Putin said:

> "I impressed by his behaviour when there was an attempt on his life. Of course there was some adrenaline rush, but [Trump] showed his true colours during the emergency. He emerged as a man. As I said before, we are going to work with the head that will garner the trust of the American people and this shall be in practice. If he wins, I will not call him … you see, Washington was calling almost every other week, and they stopped. If they want to rebuild contacts, as I said, we have nothing against them" (Times of India 2024).

Using Guy (2012) and Busia (1967), we can analyse Putin's narrative above from an Afrocentric perspective, noting that – similarly to how people viewed headmen in indigenous African political leadership – Putin recognises the US as just another country, not *the* superpower. Casting the globe as an indigenous African village (Guy 2012; McLuhan 1994), we can liken Putin to a headman who is cautiously trying to extend an olive branch in the hope of working with Trump – another headman in another village – on issues affecting their countries (in this analogy, their villages). But he is careful not to recognise the US and the US people as more powerful than Russia and the Russian people. This is typical of indigenous African peoples, who have always emphasised equality (Busia 1967). This consistent diplomatic and sometimes militaristic refusal to recognise the US as a superpower can be seen in all the BRICS countries, and even in smaller countries around the world. Drawing from the 1970s, we see how Vietnam fought a spirited military war with the US for a long time

until the US withdrew its troops because they were suffering unnecessary casualties. In 2003, Iraq's military war with the US also exposed the US as not so powerful. Although the US successfully deposed the then-Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein, we argue that this militaristic and sometimes diplomatic portrayal of the US as not so powerful was exacerbated by the technologies of digital capitalism. These militaristic confrontations have been shared across the globe through digital capitalist technologies such as social media, allowing citizens from different countries to analyse them and create perceptions and beliefs about how the US is not as powerful as it claims to be.

Multipolarity and self-projection of the emerging powers as equals with the US

We see that emerging powers such as China and India are projecting themselves as equally powerful and capable of challenging the superpower status of the US. We argue that the emerging powers recognise the multipolarity of global power and are therefore careful not to challenge the US for superpower status in the world. In his congratulatory message on Trump's presidential victory in November 2024, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted:

> "Heartiest congratulations my friend @realDonaldTrump on your historic election victory. As you build on the successes of your previous term, I look forward to renewing our collaboration to further strengthen the India-US Comprehensive Global and Strategic Partnership. Together, let's work for the betterment of our people and to promote global peace, stability and prosperity" (Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi).

The tweet shows that Modi is keen to project the idea that the US and India should work as equals to improve the lives of their people. He sees the US as a peer, not a superpower. We also see India projecting itself as a rising power worthy of constituting a multipolar entity, rather than as

an underdog to the US. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa also tweeted his congratulations to US President-elect Trump:

> "I had an opportunity this afternoon to personally extend South Africa's well wishes and congratulations to President-Elect @realDonaldTrump on his election as the 47th President of the United States of America. During our telephone call, we both agreed on the need to strengthen our trade and political ties. We also look forward to hosting President-Elect Trump during the #G20 Heads of State Summit next year" (South African President Cyril Ramaphosa).

Ramaphosa was at the time set to host the Group of Twenty (G20) in Johannesburg in 2025. Alongside the congratulatory message to Trump, we see the tone of Ramaphosa's invitation, with the tweet careful not to portray the US as more powerful than South Africa. The invitation came shortly before Trump's later accusation that South Africa was illegally dispossessing white-owned land in South Africa. The South African people and Ramaphosa understood Trump's February 2025 launch of his anti-South Africa messaging as a belittling of them – in the manner of a country claiming superpower status. Both the South African people and their president used the technologies of digital capitalism, particularly social media (Schiller 2000), to respond categorically, arguing that South Africa has its own ways of resolving internal conflicts and does not need US intervention. This portrays the US as having limited power – within its own territorial boundaries – and therefore as not being a superpower. It is a reminder to the US that the globe consists of multipolar powers, with no single country able to claim superpower status. We can further compare South Africa's portrayal of the US to the indigenous African people who left the villages to form others (Guy 2012). Here we see that countries around the world are willing to move away from the norm – the superpower status of the US – in order to forge their own paths, in what I discuss as the emergence of multipolar powers.

Economic strength in the emerging powers, and the weakening of the US

The globally networked economy, facilitated by the US policy of offshore cheap-labour production, helps emerging economies to grow faster. While the US exploits cheap labour in the emerging economies, the emerging economies' population are engaged in gainful employment and economic development. For example, working-class people in emerging economies, including China, invest their resources in the stock markets, where their resources increase with compound interest (Schiller 2000). Because of the large working-class population in China, resources can be pooled more quickly than in the US, where the lower numbers of working-class people struggle to maintain jobs under high taxation. Working class here means gainful employment. Logically, China's 1.4 billion people have more people in gainful employment that US's 349 million people (Statista 2026). As a result, many investors would like to invest in emerging markets, where there are higher returns due to cheap labour and lower taxation. As a result, China and India are experiencing higher economic growth than the US, because they have higher numbers of working-class populations that have a culture of investing their resources in the stock market. The emerging economies are, therefore, powerful economic entities that effectively compete with the US' 'superpower' status. These entities make up the multipolar formation. In March 2025, the U.S. President Donald Trump, issued an ultimatum through twitter to force BRICS member states to abandon efforts to create a rival currency. The BRICS members are exploring alternative payment systems and domestic currencies to reduce global reliance on the U.S. dollar Trump tweeted:

> "The idea that the BRICS Countries are trying to move away from the Dollar while we stand by and watch is OVER. We require a commitment from these Countries that they will neither create a new BRICS Currency, nor back any other Currency to replace the mighty U.S. Dollar or, they will face 100% Tariffs and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful U.S. Economy. They can go find

another "sucker!" There is no chance that the BRICS will replace the U.S. Dollar in International Trade, and any Country that tries should wave goodbye to America" (US President Donald Trump).

We can analyse Trump's tweet using Schiller's (2000) view that the networked economy is stimulating economic growth around the world, away from the saturated national economies of the 1970s. Economic growth within the emerging powers appears to be threatening the US dollar in a way that has caught Trump's attention. This economic weakening of the US is accompanied by a reduction in its political influence around the world. Notably, the BRICS countries targeted by the US president's tweet were left unscathed.

Election-rigging and name tainting

There are public allegations that some of the BRICS countries, including Russia, are using the technologies of digital capitalism, such as new media technologies, to politically influence the US presidential elections. In another tweet during his first term, Trump wrote, 'Russia, Russia, Russia! That's all you heard at the beginning of this Witch Hunt Hoax … And now Russia has disappeared because I had nothing to do with Russia helping me to get elected. It was a crime that didn't exist' (US President Donald Trump).

The tweet was in response to public accusations that Russia hacked the US electoral system and rigged the election in Trump's favour. While Trump denied the allegations, the Russian president responded sarcastically, saying that even a lazy child sitting on a couch could hack into the US electoral system. This was Russia's way of downplaying the US's superpower status. In the eyes of the public, if Russia can interfere with its electoral processes, it implies that the US is not the superpower that the technologies of digital capitalism project to the world. Separately, the US projected itself as not in control of global affairs when the BBC reported that Trump sarcastically referred to COVID-19 as the 'Chinese virus' that caused 'stigmatisation of China'. China's president urged the US to

correct its mistake and stop making groundless accusations against China because it was tarnishing its name. We observed that Trump's reference to COVID-19 as the 'Chinese virus' is a way of surrendering to China. This is because the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic was so huge that if the US is attributing its outbreak to China, this suggests that China is very powerful.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes that the idea of the US as a superpower is no longer viable. The idea is contestable, especially around the complexities of the binaries reflected in how other actors perceive the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South. The idea that the US is a superpower was created by the technologies of digital capitalism. However, that same digital capitalism has enabled the emergence of a networked economy, especially social media such as X and Facebook, which has facilitated the emergence of powerful formations such as the BRICS. The BRICS nations are effectively competing with the 'superpower' status of the US. The networked economy allows US industries to prioritise offshore production processes. These industries export jobs to countries such as China and India, where labour is cheap and taxes are low. This increases the number of working-class people in emerging economies while reducing the number of working-class people in the US. Since the culture of the working class in emerging markets is to invest in the stock markets, we see that the emerging markets have increasing shares in the global stock markets, while the US has decreasing shares. Social media also allows leaders and people to follow economic and political events around the world simultaneously and easily. Leaders exchange communication as a measure of power, allowing people to perceive that emerging economies are as powerful as the US. This creates a multipolar entity that leaves no room for superpower status.

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CHAPTER 11

Gender Equality and the Non-Aligned Movement: Looking Backward to Predict the Future

David Mugambe Mpiima
Makerere University, Uganda

Introduction

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was formed as a centrist bloc, neither capitalist nor communist, as an attempt to transcend Cold War politics (Potter and Mukhatzhanova 2011). According to Jain and Chacko (2009), the NAM was born to challenge expected behaviours. 'Third World' countries (as Global South countries were then known) were expected to align with one of the powerful blocs – the Capitalist West or the Communist East – to command international attention, prestige, capital and technical and military assistance for survival (McMahon 2013). The NAM, however, sought a different path for international relations, promoting the right to independent judgment, struggling against colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism, and seeking to moderate relations with big powers (Jain and Chacko 2009). The NAM was born in the 1950s, when the world experienced Cold War military, economic, cultural and social rivalry (Lüthi 2016). Thus, the NAM was forged on clear ideological and political terms, positively embracing the Third World identity as Cold War victims (Jain and Chacko 2009; Lüthi 2016).

The Third World needed a voice in the global arena, after most of these countries' concerns were drowned out by Cold War divisions (Jain and Chacko 2009; Lüthi 2016). Voice, one of the tenets of women's empowerment, captures one's ability to be heard and to bargain, effectively reflecting power and authority (Kabeer 2010). Voice shapes decisions, lives and futures privately and publicly (Eerdewijk et al. 2017).

Voice can positively or negatively impact international relations, and the Third World attempted to redirect global affairs using the NAM as a platform. Said differently, Said differently, the marginalisation of the Third world voices within the international systems mirrored the broader exclusion of women from political decision0making and global structures. Postcolonial feminist scholars have argued that nationalist movements often reproduced prevailing patriarchal norms, leaving women underrepresented in leadership despite their significant contributions to the struggles (Mohanty 1988; Udenigwe et al. 2025). In this regard, the NAM reflected many of the gender inequalities embedded in postcolonial states rather than explicitly seeking to challenge them. Nevertheless, the movement also created important political spaces through which women from newly independent nations could articulate their interests and assert their agency. As Jain and Chacko (2009: 988) observe, 'NAM gatherings offered a space where the women from former colonies could reassert the standpoint that they were active agents in their nations, contributors to their country's progress, and not mere consumers of social services.' Thus, NAM, even though not founded as a feminist project, became an important platform through which women from the Global South could engage in international debates on development, justice and self-determination.

The connection between the NAM's ideological agenda and the plight of women is captured in the Inaugural Address by Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at the 1985 NAM Conference:

> "The Non-Aligned Movement represents a very large majority of the humanity of this earth. We have traditionally fought against imperialism, colonialism, racism, non-imperialism, and neocolonialism, and against all forms of discrimination and domination. We have fought for an equitable social and economic order. The fight for the rights of women is part of this large fight" (United Nations 1985).

Thus, gender discourses found a home in the NAM through the treatment the member countries received. The discourse, gendered as it was, shaped

the complexities of the binaries reflected in how other actors perceived the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South. The early NAM movements and meetings – such as the Afro-Asian Youth Movement that was associated with the Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement at the 1955 Bandung Conference, the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, educational exchanges, and the July 1962 Cairo Economic Conference – included woman attendees, further improving relations and sisterhood (Beir 2002). The status of women among the non-aligned countries was a humanitarian, legal and developmental issue (Tomsic 1990). The analysis this chapter makes, therefore, focuses on the NAM's gender equality debates since its inception and to date. The analysis then forms a foundation for predicting the future of gender equality within the movement by looking at debates, funding and enforcement mechanisms.

Methodological note

This chapter utilises an extensive literature review, including books, journals and online resources related to the NAM, to track events. The review shows that NAM maintains strong online documentation for its Heads of State and Government Summits, but records for other meetings – such as Ministerial Summits and Spouses' or First Ladies' Summits – are sparse or inconsistently archived. These 'other' NAM summits are very important, because they provide rich additional information and pronouncements beyond the main summit. The lack of proper records potentially weakened the level of detail necessary for a thorough analysis, but the available records were skilfully utilised and analysed to produce this chapter.

History of the NAM: Tracing the roots of gender equality

The NAM has a rich history spanning over 63 years. The organisation was started by developing nations as a loose political grouping for countries that were neither on the left nor the right, and as a response to Cold War rivalries following the end of the Second World War (Potter and

Mukhatzhanova 2011). The NAM's quest for equality implied that gender equality would form part of its discussions sooner rather than later. The radical rhetoric of the NAM resonated with the women's movement agenda (Jain and Chacko 2009). Equality without gender equality is possible, but it is hollow equality, as it creates another layer of inequalities based on gender lines, locking women – who constitute 49.7 per cent of the global population – out of development, political participation, and enjoyment of social rights (World Bank 2024). This chapter traces gender equality in the NAM to the personalities who, in the beginning, promoted the organisation, the UN Development Agenda, and the global Women's Movement discourses that have shaped gender equality debates.

Key NAM figures and gender equality discourses

At inception, the NAM was heavily promoted by key personalities such as Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sukarno of Indonesia, whose support for women's equality was steeped in Soviet Union politics and policies even when communism despised feminism (Maskalan 2022). The Soviet Union's mantra was 'equal obligations' and 'equal rights (Tagra 1994). Shining a light on the history of the five NAM luminaries mentioned above does not diminish the contributions of other leaders at the time, but shows that even before the advent of the NAM, some of the NAM promoters were doing worthwhile gender equality work in their respective countries. To understand the Bandung Principles and their association with the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), it is necessary to examine the key figures of the Bandung Conference and the First NAM Summit. This offers a backdrop for the kind of world desired by the leaders at the time for women within their countries and the NAM.

Jawaharlal Nehru

Jawaharlal Nehru was a devoted gender equality champion before and after he became India's Prime Minister (Joshi 2023; Sharma 2018;

Tagra 1994; Mazumdar 1989). More than anything else, Nehru wished to be remembered as a great contributor to women's empowerment after his demise (Mazumdar 1989). From early on, Nehru detested the subordination and seclusion of women and advocated for women's economic rights and freedoms, and the equal participation of women in civil rights movements (Joshi 2023; Sharma 2018; Tagra 1994). He campaigned for women to work side by side with men to reduce unemployment and poverty, especially in the countryside – something he termed the salvation of Indian society (Mazumdar 1989: 5). He decried women in India and the world as an economically depressed class and sought to create equal opportunity and equal privilege for them (Mazumdar 1989). Nehru campaigned for women's employment in cottage industries, mines, plantations, domestic work and retail trade. During his leadership, women had protections in the workplace and were granted adequate maternity leave (Goraya 2008). He further championed women's social and legal status, and their right to hold property and a profession or occupation in order to realise equal status and opportunity (Mazumdar 1989; Sharma 2018).

Nehru promoted the primacy of education as a foundation of socio-economic progress and a route to equality of opportunities (Goraya 2008; Mazumdar 1989). He argued that women formed half of the population and were mothers and caregivers, and thus could not be left uneducated (Joshi 2023). He maintained that education could break patriarchal rules and customs that had long kept women chained (Joshi 2023, Mazumdar 1989). Therefore, to bolster women's education standards, free education was proposed, and Nehru created a National Committee on Women's Education (1958–1959) under the Ministry of Education after realising that education was a key ingredient in the fight for gender equality (Goraya 2008; Joshi 2023; Mazumdar 1989: 11). Enrolment improved, but the absolute number of illiterate women grew, especially in the countryside (Mazumdar 1989).

Having taken lessons from the Women's Suffrage Movement, especially in England, Nehru was not afraid to appoint women to positions of leadership (Joshi 2023; Mazumdar 1989; Sharma 2018; Tagra 1994). He nominated a woman to the [Indian National] Congress

Working Committee, a move opposed by women themselves, but the seeds of gender equality in politics had been sown (Sharma 2018; Tagra 1994). Through Nehru's leadership, women were granted leadership positions at a time when women around the world were still fighting for voting rights (Sharma 2018). The rights of women were later enshrined in the Constitution of India and other women's rights-centred legislations (Goraya 2008; Mazumdar 1989; Sharma 2018).

However, Nehru has been critiqued for not understanding the complexities of women's rights in India, and for his failure to link them to the complex social, political and economic issues of Indian society (Mazumdar 1989). He has also been critiqued for limiting major women's-rights reforms to Hindu personal law, a non-secular approach that neglected the rights of Muslim and Christian women (Sharma 2018). Nevertheless, as a torchbearer of the NAM, Nehru espoused the same ethos and view about gender parity and women's socioeconomic rights as seen in his women's emancipation agenda (Sharma 2018).

Josip Broz Tito

Way before the 1961 NAM conference in Belgrade, Josip Broz Tito, a one-time partisan and eventual leader of Yugoslavia, sought to amalgamate women's rights and gender equality into the early days of the liberation of the Yugoslav people (Maskalan 2022). The oppression of women was attributed to differences in class rather than men, based on Fredrick Engels' socialist works (Maskalan 2022). Tito, through his leadership, is credited for expanding the role of women in Soviet-styled Yugoslavia. His influence is evident in the role played by women in the Yugoslav Partisans (People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia or *Narodnooslobodilačka vojska Jugoslavije* – NOVJ), who assumed significant responsibilities in the 1940s (Pantelić 2013). Initially, women joined the partisan brigades in medical and auxiliary roles as nurses and doctors, but Tito expanded their roles in 1942 to include armed combat and community/public roles (Pantelić 2013). Armed women *(partizanka)* were used in propaganda and recruitment campaigns, the Women's Antifascist Front (WAF) was subsequently created, in 1942 (Rieber 2022). The WAF was a socio-

political group that mobilised women's direct and indirect participation in the anti-fascist resistance (Maskalan 2022). Women performed admirably, earning military and political promotions and producing 93 heroines, despite a lack of emphasis on gender equality at the beginning of the National Liberation War (Pantelić 2013). Women rose to the apex of the partisan state, with expanded civil rights to allow them to vote and stand for election (Pantelić 2013; Rieber 2022). For some time after the war, the Yugoslav government supported women's rights, especially those related to work, until women were expelled and the WAF was dissolved in 1953 (Fidelis et al. 2014; Maskalan 2022). Post-war Yugoslavia had visible gender inequalities in education, a concentration of women in the countryside, and lower political status (Fidelis et al. 2014; Reeves 1990).

Gamal Abdel Nasser

President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt (1956–1970) is credited for altering the role of religion and the status of women at a time when both religious and women's groups sought to make changes to Egyptian society (Dhall 2018). Nasser granted women the right to vote and run for parliament under the 1956 Constitution (Bier 2011; Dhall 2018; Salem 2017). The right to vote and stand for election was a rallying call for the Egyptian Women's Movement and a key demand during their participation in the independence struggle (Salem 2017). While Nasser was in leadership in 1951, the Women's Popular Resistance Committee was formed to join the resistance against the British (Salem 2017). He also welcomed the United Nations (UN) Charter with open arms and explained his vision for women's rights by asserting that women had equal rights with men, and that all shackles impeding them had to be broken off so that they could engage positively with social life (Salem 2017). Influenced by the socialist policies of the Union of Soviet States of Russia (USSR), Nasser ruled at a time of intense feminist activism in Egypt against gender oppression, promoting state feminism and granting women access to work and education (Bier 2011; Salem 2017). State feminism was a product of the promises that Nasser had made to women, that the post-war era would usher in equal footing with men by

dismantling patriarchal structures in the family and draw women into the development of the country (Bier 2011). The state was thus expected to mobilise women to work in state institutions (Bier 2011; Dhall 2018).

Nasser's social changes, like other changes, aimed at creating a 'new woman' in Egypt with changed roles (Youssef 2008). The social changes included the 'westernization of Egyptian women, ditching arranged marriages for affection-led marriages, regulation of families, and the encouragement of fewer children' (Bier 2011). At the time, Egypt was witnessing a surge in fertility rates among rural and working-class women, leading the Nasser regime to promote state family planning by disseminating birth control methods (Bier 2010). In addition, Nasser granted women free higher education in 1957 (Youssef 2008).

Nasser was later critiqued for dissolving the Egyptian Feminist Union and for the jailing of several leading feminist figures (Bier 2011; Salem 2017). His model of state feminism is therefore seen as having suppressed independent feminist activism in Egypt until the 1970s (Bier 2011).

Kwame Nkrumah

Like Nasser's in Egypt, the views of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, about women and thus gender equality, were tied to the resistance to colonialism and a demand to restore women to political and public life (Mama 2023). Nkrumah is credited for passing the Representation of the People (Women Members) Act in 1959, which introduced a quota system that ensured the election of 10 women in the Ghanaian parliament at its first sitting in 1960, and one woman was appointed Deputy Minister (Akufo 2023; Mama 2023; Network for Women's Rights in Ghana 2023). This was a reward for the contribution of women to the struggle against colonialism (Mama 2023). Nkrumah also created the National Council for Women in Development (NCWD) under his Convention People's Party (CPP) government, and organised the International Conference for Women of Africa and the Diaspora (CWAAD) in 1960, the first of its kind (Mama 2023). The conference, organised under the National Federation of Ghana Women (NFGW), had Nkrumah's full support and brought together over 150 women

(Akufo 2023). Nkrumah appointed four prominent women as CPP National Propaganda Secretaries to lead national mobilisation, and he opened a women's wing in all CPP branches (Abass and Döşkaya 2017; Akufo 2023; Mama 2023).

When the British imprisoned Nkrumah in 1950, the women he had recruited into the CPP Women's Section led the campaigns that helped Nkrumah win the 1951 election while still in prison and become the first post-independence leader of Ghana in 1957 (Abass and Döşkaya 2017). Nkrumah and the CPP formed the NCGW to promote women's participation in post-independent Ghana's leadership and development initiatives (Akufo 2023; Mama 2023). Nevertheless, Nkrumah has been critiqued for not encouraging the leading women of the CPP to contest elections in the same way he encouraged men (Akufo 2023).

In the social realm, Nkrumah expanded access to education for girls and women, including free textbooks and increased opportunities for university study (Mama 2023). Despite these education reforms, Nkrumah has been critiqued for economic investments in industry and agribusiness that prioritised male labour at the expense of women (Mama 2023).

Achmed Sukarno

Achmed Sukarno became Indonesia's first president following the 1945 Proclamation of Independence. He led the struggle against Dutch re-occupation and mobilised women's groups into the independence movement (Hauser 2009). Equality between men and women was enshrined in the 1945 Constitution, and the Indonesian women's movement expanded during his presidency (Hauser 2009). Furthermore, Sukarno ratified the UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women through Law No. 68 of 1958 (Badruddin et al. 2019). Nevertheless, Sukarno could not come to terms with women competing with men for political representation, resulting in low levels of representation of women at national and local levels (Pohlman 2011). Although women had contributed to the anti-colonial campaigns, the expectation was that they would not actively take part in politics after independence – and this

attitude carried over into the new government (Wieringa 1996). This view, it has been said, was influenced by Javanese cultural norms, which gave women no political leadership or public roles due to perceptions of lack of competence for such roles (Sundari and Suyanto 2019).

In the 1950s, six women's organisations that had aligned themselves with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) merged to form *Gerakan Wanita Indonesia* (Gerwani) – the Indonesian Women's Movement – which mobilised millions of women and worked alongside other women's groups to advance their rights (Hapsari et al. 2020; Hauser 2009; Wieringa 1996). The focus of the women's organisations was restricted to the social realm (Wieringa 1996). Gerwani, for instance, focused on uplifting the status of peasant farmers, fighting illiteracy and the political education of women (Hapsari et al. 2020). Attention was also given to health, marriage and the elimination of children and forced marriages, despite disagreements on the issue of polygamy, as Sukarno was an avowed polygamist (Pohlman 2011). In addition, religious-based organisations like Aisyiyah (Muhammadiyah) and Fatayat (Nahdlatul Ulama) emerged to promote literacy (Hapsari et al. 2020). Under Suharto, who became Indonesia's second president after deposing Sukarno in 1965, women's organisations were increasingly required to align with political parties rather than operate independently (Hapsari et al. 2020). However, the women's movement had already begun to decline under Sukarno's increasingly authoritarian rule, and it survived only until 1965, when General Suharto removed him from power in a military coup (Hapsari et al. 2020; Hauser 2009).

The NAM, at its founding, thus had five promoters of gender equality, who held three important views in common: (1) a belief in the socialist ethos that would organise their socio-political worldview, (2) the struggle for independence that had exposed them to working with women either out of desperation or a genuine belief that women could contribute to nation-building, and (3) a degree of exposure to gender equality debates during independence struggles and as first post-independence leaders of their respective countries. Aside from Sukarno, whose views were shaped by Javanese cultural norms that tended to confine women to the domestic sphere, Nehru, Tito, Nkrumah and Nasser brought

more explicit commitments to gender equality into the early diplomatic spaces that preceded the NAM. Their support for equality is reflected in the Bandung Conference's reaffirmation of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which emphasised non-discrimination and human dignity. These commitments would later underpin the NAM's approach to gender equality.

Gender equality through the NAM conferences: looking at the communiques

The precursor to the 19 NAM conferences was the 18–24 April 1955 Bandung Asian–African Conference, which attracted six African countries, namely Egypt, Ethiopia, the Ivory Coast, Liberia, Libya and Sudan. One of the principles pronounced at the conference was: 'Respect for fundamental human rights and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.' This principle is gender-neutral in wording and potentially underpins future gender equality discourses. The conference communique made no explicit commitment to gender equality or women's rights but fully aligned itself to the UN Charter, which commits to gender equality in its preamble: '… to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small …' (United Nations 1945). The UN Charter does not specifically address any gender issues after the preamble, except in Article 8, which talks about the right of men and women to participate in its organs.

In addition, the Bandung Conference took note of the UDHR, which commits to the rights of men and women in its preamble. In Article 2, the UDHR emphasises the universality of the rights in the declaration regardless of sex, among other things (United Nations 1948). Therefore, the alignment of the Bandung Conference with the UN Charter and the UDHR provided a footing from which members could focus on gender equality and women's rights in the future.

Thus far, two critical elements with the potential to shape the gender equality direction of NAM declarations in subsequent conferences have been identified: The first is that the early promoters of the NAM had

engaged in gender equality work within their own countries. The second is that the Bandung Conference, often acclaimed as the background conference to the 1961 Belgrade Conference, made commitments to the UN Charter and the UDHR that included gender and women's rights commitments.

After the first formal NAM Summit in 1961, the NAM aimed to hold summits every three years, with each meeting leading to declarations about topical global issues that affected member states. Over the years, women's rights and gender equality have formed part of the declarations at different summits, as summarised in the table below.

Table 11.1: NAM Summit declarations/communiques and gender equality. All NAM documents were accessed at *https://nam.go.ug/previous-chairmanship-documents*.

No	Conference (Year)	Key gender declaration(s)
	Yugoslavia (1961)	-
	Egypt (1964)	-
	Zambia (1970)	-
	Algeria (1973)	-
	Sri Lanka (1976)	-
	Cuba (1979)	1. Emphasised the role of women in development (appreciating the members' participation in the conference on the role of women in development held in Tehran, May 1979). 2. Encouraged member states to participate in the Women's Decade. 3. Underscored the relationship between women's social and economic development and their health, education and employment.
	India (1983)	1. Full and meaningful participation of women in social, political, economic, and cultural life. 2. The UN system to have a special component for women's development programmes in its existing budgets. 3. All members must sign and ratify the UN Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination against Women. 4. Urged members to support implementing programmes to enhance women's role in developing countries' development. 5. Offered full support to the 1985 UN World Conference on Women.
	Zimbabwe (1986)	-

No	Conference (Year)	Key gender declaration(s)
	Yugoslavia (1989)	1. Emphasised the need for women's participation in all aspects of development. 2. Called for the speedy implementation of the Nairobi conference resolution to create opportunities for women in development. 3. Called for the end of apartheid, interventions and conflict that make women primary victims.
	Indonesia (1992)	-
	Colombia (1995)	-
	South Africa (1998)	1. Emphasised women's rights and participation in all aspects of development. 2. Called for the eradication of discrimination against women. 3. Called for the implementation of gender policies to achieve gender equality.
	Malaysia (2003)	1. Called for gender mainstreaming. 2. Recommitted to the Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women. 3. Committed to taking effective actions to prevent the trafficking of women and girls and the victimisation of and violence against women. 4. Called upon those states which were still not parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Optional Protocol to the Convention to consider ratifying them. 5. Called upon members to protect women and girls against perpetrators of violence, and violence during conflicts.

No	Conference (Year)	Key gender declaration(s)
	Cuba (2006)	1. Welcomed the election of women leaders as Heads of State and Government such as in Chile, Jamaica and Liberia, and underlined the importance of gender equality in full accordance with Millennium Goal No. 3: 'Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women'. 2. Promoted the rights of immigrants, especially women and children. 3. Promoted measures against trafficking, especially against women and children. 4. Recommitted to the Declaration and Plan for Action adopted by the 4th World Conference on Women. 5. Resolved to eliminate all forms of violence against women. 6. Emphasised equality before the law and protection of women's rights.
	Egypt (2009)	1. Reiterated the need for harmonisation and advancement in gender equality and empowerment of women 2. Reiterated the need to protect the rights and freedom of women in conformity with the UDHR. 3. Urged members to combat trafficking in women. 4. Recognised the election of women to high offices per Millennium Development Goal No. 3: 'Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women'. 5. Recommitted to the implementation of the Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women. 6. Resolved to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child, especially in situations of armed conflict and foreign occupation. 7. Reaffirmed the promotion of gender mainstreaming in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes.

No	Conference (Year)	Key gender declaration(s)
	Iran (2012)	1. Committed to paying special attention to women's rights and their social, economic and political participation.
	Venezuela (2016)	1. Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health. 2. Promote the involvement of women in peace-building efforts. 3. Encouraged job creation for women and access to resources, finances, human capital and knowledge. 4. Agreed to promote women's rights, gender equality and the quality of life of women. 5. Committed to combating trafficking in women in all facets. 6. Welcomed women's increased political leadership, including those in the highest offices. 7. Reaffirmed their commitment to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. 8. Recognised the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and committed to supporting the UN Women in its implementation of the same. 9. Reaffirmed commitment to gender mainstreaming in the design and implementation of policies and programmes.

No	Conference (Year)	Key gender declaration(s)
	Azerbaijan (2019)	1. Committed to the promotion of gender equality and women and girls' economic empowerment as part of the 2030 agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 2. Welcomed the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health. 3. Adequate representation of women. 4. Supported meaningful participation of women in all stages of the peace process. 5. Stressed the need for member states to increase women's participation in peacekeeping operations. 6. Highlighted the importance of adopting measures aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of women and gender equality. 7. Stressed that all women have equal rights to economic resources and appropriate financial services, and the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 8. Recognised the need to strengthen efforts to enhance food security and nutrition and to focus efforts on smallholders and women farmers. 9. Committed to combating and eliminating all forms of trafficking in women and children subjected to forced labour, sexual or commercial exploitation, violence and sexual abuse. 10. Encouraged all the states to contribute actively to ensuring that the Information Society is founded on and stimulates respect for gender equality and women's empowerment. 11. Recommitted the NAM to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. 12. Reiterated a firm commitment to join efforts and continue combating all forms of violence against women and girls. 13. Resolved to take appropriate measures to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women.

No	Conference (Year)	Key gender declaration(s)
	Uganda (2024)	1. Reaffirmed the importance of achieving gender equality and empowerment of women by 2030. 2. Committed to combating all forms of violence against women and girls. 3. Emphasised the need for male engagement in women's rights and gender equality. 4. Held a side event on women's rights with a focus on: • progress of gender equality among member states. • identifying challenges, fostering dialogue and promoting innovative solutions for persistent obstacles. • the gender digital divide and digital literacy. • enhancing women's participation in leadership, especially in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

The first five NAM conferences did not offer any gender commitments in their declarations, as the focus was on consolidating national liberation agendas and supporting liberation movements in Africa against colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism. In addition, there was a clamour to strengthen the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to deal with challenges in Africa, international peace and security, and the Palestinian question. The gender equality question, which had been at the forefront of the founding figures of the NAM, was deprioritised within the NAM due to the existential threats prioritised between 1961 and 1976.

Globally, more gender equality events and declarations began to shape the gender terrain in addition to the UN Charter, UDHR and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Whereas NAM declarations on gender equality and women's rights remained sporadic – with no gender-related commitments in 1986, 1992, or 1995 – the foundations for more sustained engagement

had already been laid. The World Conference of the International Women's Year in 1975, however, occurred too soon to have any substantive impact on the 1976 NAM Summit. However, the impact became visible at the 1979 NAM Summit, which recognised members' participation in the UN World Conference on Women held in Tehran that year; supported women's economic participation; and encouraged members to engage actively in the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985). In addition, the NAM expressed support for the 1985 UN World Conference on Women.

At the time, the gender agenda was dominated by the Women in Development (WID) approach, which viewed the absence of women from development as deliberate (Boserup et al. 2013; Muyoyeta n.d). The task at the time was to have women access resources and participate in development. The best way to improve the position of women was to include them in development planning and implementation, especially small income-generating projects. The WID also emphasised family planning and women's nutrition (Muyoyeta n.d). Table 1 shows that the NAM focused on women's employment, education and health, key areas of focus under the WID, which influenced development approaches until the early 1980s. The later years, after the 1983 NAM Summit, had some splattering of WID, but they were more influenced by critiques of the approach under Second Wave feminism. Second Wave feminism had arisen out of anti-imperialist consciousness and conflicts in South America, Africa and Asia (Baxandall and Gordon 2005). It called for collective action against women's oppression. At the 1983 and 1989 summits, the emphasis was on full and meaningful participation of women in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres of life. In addition, calls focused on ending apartheid and conflicts that dehumanise and victimise women.

The NAM declarations on gender equality and women's rights became more predictable starting with the 1998 NAM Summit in South Africa. The conference came against the backdrop of the 1995 Beijing Conference, which had made far-reaching declarations at the Fourth World Conference on Women. The following twelve key areas were highlighted for action: poverty; education; health care; violence against women; armed conflict; economic inequality; power-sharing and

decision-making; mechanisms to promote the advancement of women; human rights; stereotyping and communications; the environment; and the girl child (United Nations 1995). These 12 key areas were to foster more gender equality and opportunities for women, men, boys and girls. Gender equality got its first mention at the 1998 NAM Summit after the term debuted at the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action meeting. So influential was the Beijing Platform that, in 2003, the NAM Summit called for gender mainstreaming policies among member countries. The Beijing Conference happened at a time when the theorisation of women in development had moved to the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, starting in the 1980s (Muyoyeta n.d). This is why the emphasis was on gender equality, having recognised the relational power between men and women, as a new way of resolving the disadvantaged position of women in development processes.

The 2005 Beijing +10 review reaffirmed the Beijing Platform of Action resolutions and called for gender equality and women's employment, addressing violence against women (VAW), women's health and education, and political and economic participation (UN Women 2005). Therefore, from the 2006 NAM Summit, the language and commitments of the NAM continued to evolve and expand, buttressed by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with its Goal 3 concerning gender equality and women's empowerment (UNDP 2003). The continued evolution of the global gender agenda and women's empowerment increasingly shaped the NAM agenda and its declarations. Members recommitted to the Declaration and Plan for Action adopted by the 4th World Conference on Women; supported the elimination of all forms of violence against women; emphasised equality before the law and the protection of women's rights; referenced their commitment to MDG 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment; and promoted gender mainstreaming across the NAM up to around 2012.

The NAM declarations from 2016 to the 2024 Uganda Summit emphasise the issue of ending violence against women, trafficking in women, the involvement of women in peace initiatives, male engagement in gender equality work, and the SDGs. The UN's 2030 Agenda commits to gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls under Goal

5 (United Nations 2015). There is a marked increase in the linkages between the NAM declarations and the global development agenda, with the NAM aligning its aspirations to those of the UN.

Thus, the NAM has grown in leaps and bounds from the general Bandung Principles to specific and far-reaching actionable declarations. The NAM has gradually incorporated gender equality and women's empowerment into its agenda, with the aid of developments in the UN. However, the NAM member countries also double as UN members, and are thus obligated to embrace UN declarations and resolutions. The NAM gender equality agenda is thus not birthed in the NAM but from the UN. The UN gender declarations are pivotal in advancing gender equality in the NAM. The 1998 NAM Summit in particular marked a fundamental moment by shifting to gender equality with influence from the 1995 Beijing Conference. It also marked the start of actionable commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in the NAM declarations. The declarations continue to touch on pressing issues like VAW, trafficking in women, inclusion of women in peace initiatives, and male involvement for gender equality. There has been a realisation that gender inequality cannot be fought by women alone, and thus the need to involve men (Tomsic 1990).

From rhetoric to institutionalisation: gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives under the NAM

Since its inception, the NAM has depended on declarations that were odious to enforce among member countries. The organisation relies on the voluntary compliance and political will of members to fall in line, which may not be a good tool when dealing with serious issues such as gender inequalities and women's oppression. However, a wave of change is sweeping through the organisation, with concrete steps being taken to help members with the 'how' question, especially on gender equality and women's empowerment. As the message on gender equality and women's empowerment becomes clearer, the NAM is channelling efforts towards institutionalising interventions to consolidate, standardise and promote good practices. Below are some of the institutionalisation efforts.

NAM has four Institutes. One of the Institutes, the Non-Aligned Movement Centre for South–South Technical Cooperation (CSSTC), is based in Jakarta, Indonesia. One of the ten programme areas of the CSSTC is Women's Empowerment (CSSTC 2024). In the past, the NAM CSSTC has conducted women empowerment training to foster gender equality. Thus, gender mainstreaming training was organised and delivered in various fields and sectors. However, the updated NAM CSSTC website shows that the Women Empowerment component was last updated in 2007, and it is reported in the five listed annual reports of the institute from 2018 to 2022. The lack of updated activities under the Women's Empowerment component, while other components are fully functional, implies a thaw in interest and focus on gender within the Institute.

The second NAM Institute is the Centre for Science and Technology of the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries (NAM S&T Centre). It started in 1985 in New Delhi, India. The NAM S&T Centre focuses on science fields, and one of the areas of focus is Science and Technology for Society and Scient and Technology for Women.

In addition, since its inception, the NAM S&T Centre has held 97 international symposiums and conferences, four of which have focused on women's emancipation (NAM S&T Centre 2024):

1. International Conference on Empowering Women in Developing Countries Through Information and Communication Technologies, JUID, Waknaghat, Solan (Himachal Pradesh), India, 1–3 June 2013.
2. International Conference on Empowering Women in Developing Countries through Better Healthcare and Nutrition, BITS, Pilani (Rajasthan), India, 22–24 April 2010.
3. International Workshop on Empowerment of Women through Science and Technology Interventions, Tehran, Iran, 14–16 December 2008.
4. International Workshop on the Role of Women in Science, Technology, and Innovation in the Global South, Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science & Technology, Mauritius [Virtual], 24–25 October 2024.

5. International Workshop on the Role of Women in Science, Technology and Innovation in the Global South, Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science & Technology, Réduit, Mauritius, 17–18 April 2025.

The third Institute is the NAM Institute for the Empowerment of Women (NIEW). The Malaysian government established the NIEW on 1 July 2006, under the purview of the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, and as a direct output of the first NAM Ministerial Meeting held in Malaysia in May 2005 (Lawyerment 2019). NIEW is dedicated to women's development and empowerment in member countries in key areas such as politics and economy, education and ICT, health, and violence against women. In 2007, the NIEW established a Resource Centre (RC) as a special library with more than 2 500 volumes of printed and non-printed materials related to women and gender.

The fourth Institute is the Nasser Fellowship for International Leadership in Cairo, Egypt. The fellowship was started in 2019 to commemorate the role of Abdel Nasser in the NAM by offering youth from African countries a chance at education in leadership and solidarity. In 2022, the fellowship was opened up for all NAM members globally. The fellowship is aligned with SDG 5 on gender equality, and 35 per cent of the 1 474 scholarships have been awarded to women since 2019 (Nasser Youth Movement 2022).

NAM Ministerial Meetings on the Advancement of Women

The NAM Ministerial Meeting on Women's Development is seen as a safe space for women to freely present their views in the NAM spirit (Jain and Chacko 2009). The Ministerial Meetings on the Advancement of Women are thus aimed at improving women's status in each member country. The inaugural meeting was held in Cuba in 2005, with the theme 'Empowering Women in Facing the Challenges of Globalization' (Jain and Chacko 2009). The third meeting was held in Doha, Qatar, in 2012 and titled 'Third Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on the Advancement

of Women'. The meeting focused on women as the drivers of economic progress, women and environmental protection, and the contribution of women to peace and security (UN 2012). These meetings have become a staple and periodic follow-up on various gender equality issues.

In this regard, the Non-Aligned Movement Conference on Advancing the Rights and Empowerment of Women, the first high-level conference, was held in Baku, Azerbaijan (AZERTAC 2023). Much as it was branded a conference, it operated with the formal diplomatic weight of an official NAM meeting. The conference focused on the empowerment of all women and girls, women's and girls' access to education, women's role in sustainable development, and the prevention of violence against women and girls.

NAM Spouses' Side Meetings

One of the avenues the NAM has instituted to discuss issues close to women and the gender equality agenda is the First Ladies' Summits or the Spouses' Side Meetings (Republic of Azerbaijan 2018; United Nations 2012). Initially, the Side Meetings were held by First Ladies of the different Heads of State, until more women started taking up leadership roles in various countries (CSSTC 2024). I therefore refer to these meetings as First Spouses' Side Meetings, as some of the participants are now men. The spouses, especially First Ladies, bring to the NAM a unique women-centred understanding of global issues that afflict women in areas of nutrition, food security, sexual violence and trafficking in women, as well as on the increased participation of women in public life (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela 2016; United Nations 2009). This adds urgency to the NAM responses to crises that dehumanise and oppress women. To this end, Ban Ki-moon, a former Secretary-General of the UN, remarked at the 15th NAM First Ladies' Summit in Egypt, 'We advocate for women, and more than that, we involve women' (United Nations 2009). This short statement implies that the NAM goes beyond speaking on behalf of women to provide a platform from which women can actively participate in activities that shape the gender equality and women empowerment agenda in a manner that reflects the desires of women themselves. This

approach has drawn First Spouses closer to NAM decision-making spaces, since most Heads of State and Government are men.

The latest First Spouses' Summit took place in Kampala on the sidelines of the 19th NAM Summit. At the meeting, to which women's activist groups and civil society actors were invited, different First Ladies spoke about their gender equality campaigns in their respective countries. Janet Kataaha Museveni, the Ugandan First Lady, showcased her travels in the world of gender equality work, starting with her orphans' organisation Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO), which she founded to mobilise women's efforts in support of orphans whose parents had died of HIV (The Independent 2024). She also spoke about her ministerial tenures, first as Minister for Karamoja Affairs and then as Minister of Education and Sports during the period in which Uganda was selected to co-host the 2027 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) with Kenya and Tanzania. Other First Ladies, such as the First Lady of Burundi, talked about the role of women's emancipation in education, healthcare and social progress (The Independent 2024). The Summit highlighted feeding programmes as a means of supporting girls in school, and also launched the We are Equal campaign. The campaign is a brainchild of the Organisation of African First Ladies for Development (OAFLAD), which aims to bridge the gender gap on the African continent (Republic of Uganda 2024; The Independent 2024).

A danger inherent in the NAM Spouses' Side Meetings is the compartmentalisation of women's empowerment and gender equality efforts, reducing the discussions to 'women's affair'. The spouses do not possess the correct political tools for action. Women's empowerment is a shared responsibility, with men expected to play an active role. Compartmentalising gender equality work under the gambit of the NAM Spouses' Side Meetings pushes the agenda to the periphery and leads to the 'feminisation' of gender equality efforts under the NAM. A strong mechanism should be created to ensure that the work done by the NAM spouses is centred in the NAM agenda and for implementation among member governments.

The institutionalisation of gender on the NAM agenda is slowly taking root as the Movement seeks to deal with gender inequality. However,

there are gaps in the efforts. There are no clear guidelines for Member States on how they can take advantage of the available gender institutes. The Ministerial meetings and Spouses' Side Meetings provide a solid platform for discussing gender equality issues, but the coverage and importance attached to them, based on the dearth of information about them, is very limited. The spouses, most of whom are women, are the best placed to discuss matters pertaining to gender inequalities and women's oppression, based on their lived experiences as women. These positions should later be synthesised and adopted by the Heads of State Summits for action into broader policy frameworks and NAM declarations. However, the spouses seem to be at the periphery, unable to inject new experiential gender perspectives into the operations of the organisation.

NAM and gender equality: What does the future hold?

Predicting the future is usually a mundane, almost impossible task that may require complex models and formulae. This section does not make any such attempt to predict. The inquest into the future is based on what has happened globally, and the commitments made in the NAM since the 1961 Belgrade Summit. The commitments of NAM on gender equality, women's rights, and empowerment have been shaped by global occurrences in the gender terrain – from the UN Charter to the UDHR, CEDAW, the Women's Decade, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and global development goals such as the MDGs and SDGs.

Given that the SDGs will drive the global development agenda until 2030, it is predictable that the NAM will continue to commit to achieving SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment. The quest for gender equality and women's empowerment is also embedded in the 16 other SDGs as targets. Based on the 18th and 19th NAM Summits, it is evident that the core gender equality issues include ending all forms of violence against women and girls, increasing male engagement in women's rights and gender equality, addressing the gender digital divide and digital literacy as reliance on technology increases, and women's participation in STEM.

Jain and Jacko (2009) recommend that spaces should be opened up

for local women to directly participate in the NAM and present their issues in their raw, local form. At the 2024 NAM Summit, civil society and women's rights groups were invited to the NAM Spouses' Side Meeting for this purpose. It is thus predictable that, going forth, non-state actors both within the women's movement and other key global development areas – such as climate change and renewable energy – will be invited to future summits to share their experiences and also offer women from different walks of life to shape the NAM gender equality agenda from their epistemic experiences. The inclusion of 'outsiders' will likely invigorate and speed up women's empowerment work by spreading action points beyond the bureaucratic state. The process may also further sharpen the targets of gender equality and women's empowerment by including indicators against which the NAM can measure achievements.

NAM member countries depend on voluntary compliance and political will among member countries to implement summit declarations on gender equality and women's empowerment. In the same light, the organisation depends on funding streams for gender equality through UN systems and other partners. However, this mode of operation slows progress and thus requires a rethink of how NAM states can be supported. Funding controlled by the NAM as an organisation may go a long way towards ensuring that member countries comply with gender equality declarations once support is made available. Globally, US$6.4 trillion was needed to fund gender equality under SDG 5 between 2023 and 2030 for the 48 developing countries that were studied (UN Trade and Development 2023). Given the superior numerical size of the NAM, there is a high financial outlay that must be met.

Conclusion

The NAM gender equality and women empowerment agenda has been central to the organisation since its formative years. If looked at from a macro level, gender equality contributes to the complexities of the binaries reflected in how other actors perceive the location of Africa vis-à-vis how Africa desires to, or actually does, locate itself in the power shifts and fixes within the Global South. What is noticeable is the fact that the

NAM gender agenda has been greatly influenced by the international socio-political outlook of different times. At the onset of the NAM, the promoters, who were inclined to socialist ideals, promoted women's rights as one of the messages honed through years of anti-colonial activism. This resulted in the recognition of the UN Charter and the UDHR. However, given that global events were mostly driven by struggles for independence, upheaval in the Middle East and consolidation of newly independent governments, the NAM's attention was swayed to these events. Women's rights hardly received any recognition at the first five NAM Summits, with a slight (though still sporadic) improvement over the next six summits. Three out of the six meetings did not have any gender declarations.

However, gender started taking centre stage in 1998. This change coincided with the conclusion of the 1995 Beijing Conference and Platform for Action. The conference had re-centred gender, expanded areas of focus for gender equality, and reinvigorated debates on women's rights. It not only invoked earlier protocols like the UN Charter and the Women's Decade, but also made a case for the UN to focus on gender equality as a priority. The NAM picked up the reigns and encouraged members to promote gender equality and women's participation in all aspects of life. By the end of the 19th NAM Summit in Kampala, Uganda, the issues of emphasis had radically changed, in two ways: 1) From the initial broad language of women's rights and emancipation to concrete areas of focus like ending VAW; promoting male engagement and women's participation in STEM; and bridging the gender digital divide. These are actionable areas of focus. 2) NAM activities had expanded from the Heads of State and Government Summits to include other activities like the Ministers' Conference and the Spouses' Side Meeting. These new fora, alongside its Institutes with their growing influence and the presence of women leaders, are strengthening gender discourses within the NAM and, therefore, the capacity to deal with diverse gender issues. It cannot be overstated that, although male leaders can be good messengers for gender equality, their experiences cannot trump women's lived realities in areas such as health, especially in maternal and child health, employment, VAW and education.

The NAM has gradually gravitated away from the goodwill of leaders

who are exposed to gender equality to its institutionalisation, buoyed by the UN's policy direction on gender. The global interconnectedness of the UN gender agenda with the NAM declarations on gender in areas of education, maternal health, trade, employment, political participation, oppression and VAW imply that the NAM cannot isolate itself from the debates but must find ways of institutionalising gender equality efforts. What is missing are mechanisms, institutions, financing and indicators to keep members in check, and in-house funding streams for promoting gender equality among member countries.

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CHAPTER 12

Conclusion: Going Forward: The Problems of African Agency and the Proposition of the Critical Theory of the Introspection of African Agency

Edward Kaweesi
Makerere University, Uganda

Introduction: stretching the meaning of African agency

The notion of African agency suggests the enabling of the African Self – an aggregation of Africans' physical space and psyche as a collective, their appreciation of who they are, their self-understanding and their ability to strive for emancipation – self-determination. It entails the quest to amplify the voices and capacity of Africans to influence processes and practices around the globe. The desired end is to extricate themselves from what Mignolo (2011: 45) references as the 'receiving end of global designs'. It also envisions their ability to be in control of their affairs and forge (or rediscover) their civilisation. This is set against the backdrop of the order of civilisations, which Therborn (2021) defines as large, enduring cultural configurations of the world. In the discussion of civilisations, sub-Saharan civilisation is designated as the only non-literary civilisation of the world (Therborn 2021: 231). Its history is mostly ignored in the delineation of the history of civilisations. The region is often regarded as the limbo of the international system (Bayart and Ellis 2000: 217). Africa, in general, is only slightly represented by the Ethiopian and Egyptian literary civilisations (Wescott 1970: 65). African agency is thus a collective pointer at the quest by Africans to be formidable in the world. It represents the quest to ameliorate the African Self from the limbo to which it was condemned by colonialism and the modern expression of imperialism.

African agency is rooted in two dynamics: self-understanding and

self-determination. The self-understanding of Africans relates to the issues that shape and shake their identity, and how their identity can be empowered to attain the confidence to articulate their interests and concerns. This is what is transmitted as being '… conscious of what it means to be an African subject' (Sefa 2018). And to appropriate Chinua Achebe, at this point, in promoting African agency, the intention is to undo the 'notoriously inaccurate' ways in which 'an image of Africa' was and remains presented by the other (Achebe 1978: 11). Relatedly, the self-determination of Africans points to the amelioration of their capacity to be in charge of their destiny. It entails progress in political organisation, economics, preservation of culture, and technological advancement. According to Sefa (2018: 117), self-determination also relates to struggles over the interface of the black skin, body, psyche, hegemonies and politics within the diaspora communities, and the imperative of the strategic reinvention of Africanness.

The dynamics of African agency are a reaction to external intrusion, including colonialism, as the most instructive. Colonialism and the (new) expressions of imperialism demand that the rest of the world imitate Western Europe and the United States. Where Africans have been required to adjust to Western ways of organising life, the African Self, in the end, has been fractured (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009). This is manifested through protracted psychological, sociological, political and economic distortions that portray Africans as an inferior collective that had to be subjugated. Colonialism is thus a reference to historical situations that entailed political and economic inequality, and social subjugation of the rest of the world by European imperial powers (Bayart and Ellis 2000). There were, however, variations in the approaches used to subjugate Africans. This depended on goals and the perceptions of the colonialists. The perceptions adopted were dependent on three issues: the level of political organisation of a particular African indigenous political formation, the intentions of the coloniser, and the time-based interests and demands of the coloniser.

For instance, whereas the overriding intention of the coloniser was the subjugation of the African peoples, in some societies they preferred the colonial logic of assimilation. In other contexts, they leaned on the

colonial logic of difference. Assimilation was aimed at 'refashioning' the colonised into 'European' persons. This is discussed as 'proximity to whiteness'. Assimilation, therefore, relates to how one prefers to present their bodies and ideals. It includes how they express their core values and the ethics that guide political, social and economic life in a given space. The logic of difference targets the separation of the coloniser (settlers) from the Africans to insulate the settlers from the 'primitive'. Apartheid was guided by the logic of the 'permanence of difference' in the name of promoting 'good neighbourliness'. This order of things was sustained through the apartheid education system after 1945. However, before that, the colonial order of indirect rule emphasised assimilation, with educated South Africans regarded as naturalised Europeans (Pillay 2021: 408–409).

Nevertheless, regardless of how colonialism was pursued and expressed, the quest for African agency remains sacrosanct. The mission is to promote African difference and authenticity. This quest is universal to Africa and the formerly colonised as a collective (Sefa 2018: 128–130). This is because of the collective fate of subjugation endured by Africans. This fate extends into the aftermath of colonialism – the postcolonial. To date, Africa remains 'pushed to the very periphery of world affairs', as A. A. Mazrui (1987) put it. What is more concerning is that, even among the formerly colonised – technically referred to as the Global South collective – the largest extent of Sub-Saharan Africa remains wretched. Albeit with some pockets of progress, the region continues to be plagued by high levels of poverty, disease burden, illiteracy, political violence, conflict and failed political transitions. The current state of Sub-Saharan may not necessarily be attributed to its colonial past, but rather to its postcolonial pitfalls. The struggle for African agency remains a problem.

This chapter, therefore, interrogates the following questions: What are the problems of African agency? How can African agency be strengthened? To sustain the discussion, the chapter argues that strengthening African agency requires the streamlining of the internal organisation of the African Self. Based on that argument, it proposes the critical theory of introspection of African agency as the approach to enable the examination of the internal organisation of African agency.

To substantiate the argument, it draws on secondary literature about colonialism and decolonisation, coloniality and decoloniality, the African Renaissance and the history of world civilisations.

The chapter is therefore organised in four philosophical stretches of African agency: In the first stretch, it delineates colonialism and coloniality as the problems of African agency. The second stretch explains the performative and practical actions that have been preferred to bolster African agency. In the third stretch, it discusses the logic of introspection that draws on the imperative of internal organisation. The fourth stretch, as the conclusion, provides the working tenets of the critical theory of introspection of African agency. The immediate focus, at this point, is on the problems of African agency.

Disaggregating the problems of African agency

In the general treatment of African agency, the intrusion of external actors, specifically Europeans, into the space (territory) and the mind (psyche) of Africans is presented as the major problem of African agency; one in which it is perpetually entangled. Intrusion elicits emotions related to anger and the collective memory of deprivation and destruction. This is discussed as the problem of colonialism.

Colonialism as a problem of African agency

Colonialism was both territorial and metaphysical. 'Territorial' refers to the cartographical demarcation and appropriation of African land by European powers during the nineteenth century. The actions undertaken in the process of appropriation were, at their worst, genocidal – as exemplified by the case of Namibia. Part of the critique of the dominance of colonialism is the charge that colonialism, especially territorial control, was a crime against Africans. Reparations have been demanded, as in the case of Namibia regarding the genocide of the Herero and Nama people by the German colonialist government in the early twentieth century (Bhambra 2022). The territorial control also entailed the supplanting of native authority to impose colonial administration. The decolonisation

agitations of the later years of the twentieth century targeted the undoing of territorial dominance.

The metaphysical control of the African Self relates to actions that were undertaken to guide the behaviour of Africans. This is discussed as the existence of the European metaphysical empire in Africa, as substantiated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. To Ngũgĩ, there exists an intangible, non-physical, and non-geographical metaphysical empire marked by an invasion of the mental universe of the formerly colonised peoples (Abumere 2025: 8). It entails the ceasing or colonising of the minds and bodies of the Africans. This was done through the colonial processes of socialisation – the 'significant mobilisation of the societies which (colonialism) held in subjectivity' (Bayart and Ellis 2000: 221). This process took two major forms: inculcation through Christian values (the Christianising mission of the colonial state) and through education (the pedagogical mission of the colonial state).

The behaviour, as an outcome, became either formal, inclined to the standards of the colonial master, or informal ('primitive'), and was related to the indigenous ways of the Africans. The colonial master perceived African bodies and minds as childish. Hegel thought that Africa was an 'enclave', '… the land of childhood removed from the light of self-conscious history and wrapped in the dark mantel of the night' (Bayart and Ellis 2000: 217). To extract the Africans from the 'dark mantle of the night' of their 'primitiveness', the African bodies had to be whipped for the mind to learn, adjust and adopt the 'civilisational' experience of the master. Africa was thus reduced to the level of a 'laboratory of modernity' for the European powers to test the workings of their schemes of modernity (Bayart and Ellis 2000: 223). The African, as the insignificant other, whom the 'extraordinary missionary' Albert Schweitzer referred to as his brother, albeit a junior one, had to be moulded into European ways. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the African was a 'prehistoric man', 'a savage counterpart to the refined [European]' (Achebe 1978: 2–8). What was standard and progressive was measured according to the yardstick of the coloniser. Whatever fell below the threshold of European socialisation was considered to be primitive.

Whereas the intention in this chapter is not to amplify the discussion

about the struggle against territorial dominance, a mental note should be made about the fact that, as in other parts of the Global South such as Latin America and Asia, practical actions had to be undertaken by the African anti-colonial movements of the 1950s and 1960s to uproot colonial administrations from the African space (Medina 2017). This is what is transmitted as decolonisation – the processes undertaken to eradicate the effects of colonisation, which related to the '… forceful subjugation and occupation of a territory by another state or political power which imposes its will and administration on that territory, known as a colony' (Olugbemiga 2020: 96).

Territorial dominance was arguably supplanted in some parts of Africa, where large tracts of land are still owned by people whose allegiance is generally to foreign actors. However, the metaphysical dominance – related to control of the African mind and body – endures to date. This is reflected in the extent to which Western values are a measure of progress in African societies. Good education is that which reflects Euro-American standards. A strong moral campus is supposedly obtained from the Christian conscience. Also, the proper ways of engaging in politics and economics are legitimised by Euro-American liberal templates of political and economic organisation. These aspects of intrusion persist to date, with the Euro–America zone and systems presented as the 'possessors of knowledge' and juxtaposed with the 'ignoramuses' of the African systems (Olugbemiga 2020: 98). This is what is discussed as decoloniality: '… the hidden web of relations governing our inherited intellectual configuration and modernist Eurocentric understandings of knowledge, ethnocultural identity, world history, racial background and religious traditions' (Medina 2017: 297). The critique is that socialisation and modernity, as rooted in Western European standards, reflect the continuity of colonial modernity – the colonial Eurocentric systems of domination and exclusion (Medina 2017: 281). Yet the continued essentialisation of the Eurocentric episteme and standards creates not a sophisticated but a confused African. Ndlovu-Gatsheni references such Africans as '… alienated [Africans] who are socialised into hating the Africa that produced them, and liking the Europe and America that rejects them' (Olugbemiga

2020: 97). As such, territorial decolonisation was generally realised, but metaphysical decolonisation remains a work in progress, thus Ngũgĩ's treatise *Decolonising the Mind* (Ngũgĩ 1986).

As a result, there have been calls for the 'delinking' of the African Self from what Mignolo (2011: 49) refers to as the 'bubble of imperial modernity'. To Ranuga (1986: 184), delinking entails '[the] process of disalienation whereby colonized minds are emptied of their incapacitating Western values and filled with the proud and psychologically liberated self [as] a necessary part of the struggle for total liberation'. However, unless African agency is intended to create a robotised African, delinking should be kept simple, as a means to facilitate the 'opening of doors to another thinking [indigenous African epistemologies] (Mignolo 2011: 48). The aim should not be to discard the already settled influences from elsewhere, but rather to facilitate a new intercultural communication where the 'universalising cosmovision' of European Self enters into a harmonious existence with the indigenous (Mignolo 2011: 49). I have particularly added that delinking is 'not to completely discard', simply because '… we are no longer what we were once and cannot rewind the tapes of our complex cultural life to a single knowable point of origin' (Ellena 2001: 48). Senghor (1962: 189) spoke of the '*vertical solidarity*' (emphasis added) which binds us to Europe'.

The efforts to delink the African space from territorial colonialism were of a practical orientation, and in most cases the Africans mobilised themselves into violence to contend with colonial administrations. The Africans rose above themselves, for as a people they had been characterised as vessels of emotions. The Europeans were under the illusion that the Africans were underdogs who could not undertake a coherent and protracted struggle against colonialism. As noted earlier, the Africans generally managed to supplant territorial dominance. However, the fight against metaphysical dominance remains. Thus, coloniality is the problem of African agency, to which this chapter turns to explain at this point.

Coloniality as a problem of African agency

The moment of coloniality refers to instances where the social, political, economic and intellectual (epistemic) aspects of coloniality are transported into the present (Pillay 2021). The notion and practice of coloniality is disaggregated into three logics: the coloniality of power, which illustrates how the global political order is tilted towards the Euro–America zone; the coloniality of knowledge relates to the Euro–America domination of knowledge generation and legitimation; and the coloniality of being sustains the objectification of individuals (Olugbemiga 2020: 97). The coloniality of being helps us to understand the contemporary forms of African agency. It explains the location of Africa within the ecosystem of human experience in relation to politics, economics, culture and technology. It also sustains the discussion of racism as the determinant of the interaction between the former colonisers and the formerly colonised peoples. Racism essentialises 'race as structure in thought', where the Africans are clustered in the 'zone of nonbeing' – below the line of the human – with their humanity questioned, and the Europeans in 'the zone of being' – existing above the line of human, enjoying access to rights, material resources and social recognition (Pillay 2021: 395). This enhances the self-identification of the Europeans as being of higher quality.

The ideology and intellectual foundations of modernity (indicators of progress) that continue to be sustained in the formerly colonised spaces are thus pegged on the Euro–American notions of development as the standard rubric. It is suggested that the racist-inclined vision of modernity is traced from the Western European colonial project, which is traced from 1492 and the conquering of the Americas (Medina 2017: 280–281). Where the decolonisation movement targeted territorial dominance, the current wave of decoloniality is focused on devising ways of delinking the African Self, particularly the mind, from the sustained expressions of coloniality. It provokes an anticolonial consciousness marked by the urgency of Africans to protest, to push back against subjugation to reclaim their dignity, as the central pillar of African agency (Sefa 2018: 123–126). Therefore, in the struggle for African agency under the chains of coloniality, protest has been material.

Protest has utility. It has a cathartic effect. It soothes the emotions and pacifies the memory of those affected by subjugation. The manifestations of protestations have been variously explained in what is referenced as indigenous scholarship. The literature in this category is either 'transformative' or 'reactive and emotive' (Doxtater 2004: 620). The reactive and emotive is of performative effect. Sefa (2018: 123) identifies the performative as 'discursive wrestling'. It is guided by the logic of 'We have at least told our story' and 'We have told them off'. The transformative actions related to the practical actions are expressed in the logic of the questions that guide African action, thus, 'What can we do to liberate ourselves?' This logic reflects the truism that human development is governed by an inescapable paradigm of struggle (Doxtater 2004: 622). To bolster African agency, particularly against coloniality, two forms of action have been preferred: the performative and practical.

The performative (reactive and emotive) has been essentialised. Achebe's (1978) decolonial discourse was a dramatised protest against what he describes as '… a preposterous and perverse kind of arrogance in reducing Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one petty European mind'. To him, the target of the struggle for African agency is the 'dehumanisation of Africa and Africans' (Achebe 1978: 9).

The imperative of performative actions

Performative actions against coloniality and other forms of intrusion relate to rhetorical protestations. The performative largely draws on *narratives of return* – discourses that reminisce about the glorious past of the formerly colonised, to protest and argue against the forms of coloniality. The essentialisation of the *narratives of return* is a form of resistance, struggle and emancipation. They bear the romantic yearning of past times (McArthur 2022: 1685). The precolonial (the indigenous), which the colonial supplanted, is presented as the alternative to aspects of colonial modernity. The *return* to the indigenous is projected as an approach to reinventing the African Self so that it gains the agency that was and continues to be sustainably eroded by expressions of coloniality. The performative actions are exemplified in the lyrics of Rastafarian

musical traditions, as transmitted in their humming of African roots and cultures, and their relationship with 'Babylon' as the ultimate true sense of liberation from subjugation. But on the emotive side, the performative conveys the message that dehumanisation as a result of colonialism and its continuities, such as racism, translates into anxiety, insecurity, feelings of devaluation, abandonment, hypersensitivity and worthlessness (Forsythe 1973: 161). This is made particularly vivid by the disorientation expressed in (sub-) genre of the ragamuffin lyrical traditions, which reflect the absurdity of subjugation that pushes one to the brink of what is 'mental'. The lyrics of ragamuffin music are thus inclined to sound-bite nonsense such as 'punaany it so nice/ punaany it so slick/ come put your lips on a 12-inch d***k' (Louis 1994: 82–83). Doxtater (2004) would dismiss this as noble savagism, but one has to appreciate the legitimate disenchantment behind the absurdity of the nonsense of the ragamuffin lyrical style. They are protesting domination.

Protest is beyond what is reasonable and unreasonable. We are taught that '… oppressive logic produces an energy of discontent, of distrust, of release within those who react against imperial violence [regardless of whether one will be construed as obscene and stupid]' (Mignolo 2011: 46). Being consistently expressive is key to protesting against external intrusion. Some of the performative protests are well-reasoned and logical. A case in point is how, in the quest to undo the pejorative identification of Africans as savages, Achebe retells a story as told by British art historian Frank Willet. The story is about a mask from the Congo which Gaugin gave to Maurice Vlaminck in 1905. To Achebe, 'The mask in question was made by [Conrad's] other savages living just north of Conrad's River Congo… the Fang people – and are [to Achebe] without a doubt among the world's greatest masters of the sculptured form' (Achebe 1978: 12).

Onokerhorage (1975) returns to the glory of the Bini civilisation of the Benin Kingdom to illustrate that urbanisation was native to Africa even before colonisation. Also, the romanticisation of the City of Timbuktu – the symbol of the modernity of Mali (1100–1700) and Songhai (1325–1591) – is instructive of the reinvention of the past to compensate for the inadequacies of the present (A. A. Mazrui 2005: 71). Precolonial African civilisations – including Benin, Mali, ancient Egypt,

Ethiopia, Great Zimbabwe and the rock-art traditions of southern Africa – are often invoked as sources of pride for the African Self (Banda and Saayman 2015: 132).

Pio Zirimu and Austin Bukenya's orature outlines the importance of folktales, epic poems, songs, myth spells, proverbs and riddles, among other formats, that fortify African ways of knowing. Micere Githae Mugo's juxtaposition of African orature and human rights illustrates how the 'zone of being' – human rights – is part of the African human experience as transmitted through orature. Cheikh Anta Diop's return to the narratives of precolonial Africa – the great kingdoms of Mali, Songhai and Ghana – debunks the Eurocentric view that aspects of modernity, such as urbanisation, are an importation of colonialism. Ngũgĩ's return to his linguistic roots, when he decided to start writing in Gikuyu, indicates that African languages can enable the expression of the Self, contrary to the legacy of colonialism and the imperial languages (Olugbemiga 2020: 99–101). The imperial languages included Italian, Castilian and Portuguese (derived from the European Renaissance), and French, English and German (derived from the period of the Enlightenment). The six languages remain the expressions of European imperial modernity in the world (Mignolo 2011).

Mafeje (1991) returns to the precolonial agrarian experiences of the interlacustine kingdoms in East Africa to counter the Eurocentric theories and definitions of production, political and economic power. He aims to make a case for Africa's capacity for self-organisation. The same path is pursued by Chami (2006) in his treatise *The Unity of the Ancient Black Africa 3000 BC to AD 500*. He dismisses the Hamitic myth that suggests that Black people are not responsible for Africa's ancient civilisations. He uses historical linguistic and archaeological evidence to make a case for the civilisation of the Bantu people – the ancient Azania and its achievements. This is identified with the Azania intellectual/philosophical tradition that chastises 'white ignorance' to underscore African agency through the liberation struggle. Chami's work offers a critique of settler-colonial sciences of social, political and economic control (Ndumiso 2021: 6–8).

The performative discourses about African agency are therefore emotive. They decry Africa's colonial past and the imperialism of the

present. They chastise the dominance of the African Self as a collective space (territorial control) and the disenabling of the African collective mind (metaphysical control). However, without a proper course of practical action, without targeted actions aimed at supplanting the metaphysical control of Africans, the supplanting of coloniality remains at the level of bedtime stories. This only soothes African agency rather than strengthening it. Practical actions to strengthen African agency are of functional necessity. It is therefore worth delineating at this point the imperative of actions in the promotion of African agency.

The imperative of practical actions

From the discussion of colonialism and coloniality as problems of African agency, the external is presented as the major thread in the oriental carpet of difficulties that afflict African agency. A plethora of discourses have been thus sustained to protest against the actions that colonialism and the ongoing aspects of coloniality have inflicted on African peoples. However, the journey to ensure that the machinations of external intrusion are thwarted today and in the future requires less of the performative and more of the practical actions. To continue with the performative is to fit into the racist narratives of Lord Milverton (1956: 181) that, 'The African, by our [European] standard, is apt to be emotional, unstable, and spasmodic, lacking tenacity, independence, and foresight, but predominantly social, avoiding personal responsibility and loving the spins of words.'

To make a clear distinction between the performative and the practical actions, let me draw on the biology of the human body. If African agency is taken as the heart of the African Self: the performative soothes the heart, and the practical builds the muscles that enable the heart to withstand stress and pump blood for the entire body to function. Building the muscle of African Agency is self-determination. Soothing requires cushioning the heart (what the narratives of return do for African agency) and the muscles from the cause of trauma (the colonial past and coloniality). This does not necessarily strengthen the heart – African agency. Building and strengthening the muscles (facets of African civilisation – the economy, politics and culture) for them to offer strong support to the heart requires

training the muscles to grow and endure the trauma that is part of the inevitabilities of our existence as beings. The soothing comes easily. It begins with self-pity and blaming the other (what decoloniality does). It requires the mere dramatisation of experience to attract pity and sympathy. So long as the cause of the trauma can be identified, performative actions can be forthcoming, including shouting out at the oppressor and the injustice. The performative actions in this case are a precondition. The rhetoric against the external as the oppressor is essentialised by the victim.

The strengthening of the muscles so that the heart can function better focuses on the external cause of the trauma, but does not dwell much on the causes, rather on the inadequacies of the victim that made the body vulnerable to trauma. The desire to empower the victim in this regard is practical. The aim is to practically engineer strength in the muscles that have suffered trauma, to help them withstand it in the future. Exercising the muscle to encourage growth, therefore, becomes essential. So, as suggested earlier, taking African agency as the heart of the African Self, two choices can be made to bolster it: either to soothe African agency, or to build its muscles against external intrusion.

Therefore, juxtaposed with the performative actions, the practical actions against coloniality are guided by the question of what needs to be done to strengthen African agency – how best can the muscle of the African Self be grown to endure the trauma and stresses of external intrusion? This explains the necessity of the actions to empower African agency. These include all articulations of the struggle for the economic, political and social empowerment of the African Self related to self-determination and attempts to regroup and address the challenges to development (Mabogo 2002). This desire is the realisation of the aspirations of the African peoples. These are discussed as expressions of the African Renaissance (AR), a term and a practical approach to African liberation popularised by Thabo Mbeki during his tenure as President of South Africa from 1999 to 2008.

The African Renaissance as the anchor of the practical actions

Whereas Rosey (1953) had earlier used the phrase to refer to African arts

and beauty as indicators of a modern community, the more enthusiastic and seminal exposition of AR was transmitted during Thabo Mbeki's delivery of his 'I am an African' speech on the occasion of the adoption of the post-apartheid Constitution of South Africa in 1996. To popularise the term, the Centre for African Renaissance Studies was founded at the University of South Africa in Pretoria (Banda and Saayman 2015). Critical to AR is the question of African empowerment. The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) was developed as the engine for the AR. Its mandate was two-pronged: to fight poverty and deliver sustainable development to Africans (Bongmba 2004). Thus, AR is a call for the recovery of the self-esteem of Africans. It draws on Diop's narrative of return, which positions Africa as the cradle of humankind and civilisation (Mbata 2006).

Also, the self-identification of Africans is central to the discussion of AR. This explains the location of the question of: who is an African, and what is African? The rather philosophical answer was that: '… [an African is] one [who] is black to the degree that one is not white or brown, [and] one is similarly African to the degree that one is not coloured, Indian or European' (Mabogo 2002: 63–64). This sense of the African Self was further amplified by Chatterji (1974: 259) in his welcoming of Léopold Sédar Senghor to the Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters). He restricted what an African is to 'self-expression for the Black Man in a Modern Age'. Of course, this racialised reference to the African Self is parochial, for it excludes other people – the Indians, Europeans and others who were born and raised in Africa and have only Africa as home. The African Renaissance must not be seen as ethnic resistance (Ntuli 1998: 16).

The discussion of the AR has, therefore, been punctuated with some points of contention. The first point of contention is whether the use of European-derived categories, such as 'renaissance', is empowering. To counter that contention, one may argue that the self-identification of Africans is drawn on European-derived categories. Senghor's Negritude, which relates being an African to the Black African spirit as its Essence or Quality of being Black, is a Latin-French word (Chatterji 1974: 264). Also, the formalisation of Negritude and the assertion of the African Self

in the world of civilisation may not have occurred had it not been for the Paris meeting between the Black students Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Senghor of Senegal, who formed the movement towards a common cultural identity for all people of African descent (Davidson 1979: 3).

But it also seems to be the natural order of civilisation that no civilisation is self- sufficient. Civilisations draw from others. The so-called four major living civilisations of the world – Chinese, Indic (Indian), Western and Levantine civilisations, in addition to the Islamic, Russian and Judaic civilisations – are all successors of civilisations now considered deceased: Egyptian, Hellenic, Mexican, Peruvian, Mesopotamian, Byzantine, Cretan, Roman and Persian (Wescott 1970: 70). In that regard, Senghor (1962: 189) is of the view that it is true that Europe brought destruction, but that it also gave Africans the values they lacked, along with technical skills and methods of production. This includes the English and French languages, which many Africans use to communicate. In essence, to criticise the AR on account of its derivation as a word is to lose sight of its imperativeness.

The validity of the general sense of the AR has also been questioned. The critique is that, instead of the general sense of AR, we should be discussing the Nigerian, Kenyan, Ethiopian, Zimbabwean or South African Renaissances (Mabogo 2002). The intrusive criticism of AR is that it is illusory, for its faith in the future is anchored on the prospects of the past, which is a non-starter for Africa's empowerment (Boloka 2007). When all contentions are considered, I am of the view that for the sake of the liberation of the African Self, all suggestions matter to the promotion of empowerment, except that one must interrogate the question of whose agency is being furthered by the practical approaches to the promotion of African agency.

Thus, in the discussion of Africa's self-determination as a central pillar of African agency, the question of whose agency is or should be promoted is of utility. This requires critical reflection on the internal organisation of African agency. This is the basis of the critical theory of the introspection of African agency:

The internal organisation of African agency: internal colonialism?

Two conflicting issues have arisen with regard to the internal organisation of African agency: the agency of the governors and that of the governed. It is a contradiction that in the quest for the agency of the governors, the cost has often been the relegation of the agency of the governed to the level of lesser citizens, or the complete dismantling of the agency of the governed (through forms of alienation, including abuse of citizen rights and dispossession of their land by the governors – the political elites). In some African countries, leaders are adapted to and imitate the actions of the coloniser, for they have appropriated the colonial script of subjugation to cling to addictive power. The oligarchical tendencies and sometimes the exclusion of the majority by the minority from state power are similar to the colonial order, where the colonial administration used coercion to subdue the native majority.

Colonialism was based on three technologies of power – discourses, procedures and rules or prescriptions – to turn Africans into subjects. In doing so, Africans were imprisoned, beaten, obliged to perform forced labour, deported, or executed (Bayart and Ellis 2000). As if in imitation of the colonial past, coercion of the mind has been elevated to the level of a practical imperative by many contemporary African leaders. Violence and coercion have been adopted as a means of retaining power and of survival. Many African leaders thus employ deception to govern. Propaganda, the privileging of the perspectives of the dominant, has for many become the national agenda to be adopted by citizens at all costs (Sefa 2018). Many African political elites ride on the imperative of liberation, promising a better life for the citizens, but later concentrate on amassing wealth and privileges at the expense of the general good. They are characterised as 'the big men [who] draw resources from the State … the State resources that could have been invested in improving society's overall welfare' (Kalu 2018: 36). The Ndung'u and Waki commissions' reports underlined the involvement of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first President, and his family in politically motivated illegal acquisitions of land on the Kenyan coast and in the Rift Valley region during the 1960s and 1970s. Close friends of the Kenyatta family and the core members of Kenyatta's political

party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), were gifted the land meant for indigenous communities. This stifled efforts to correct land-related colonial injustices in Kenya (Towett 2021). These injustices were carried forward into the postcolonial era. The reinvention of these tools of social control by African leaders in a bid to subdue their citizens is what constitutes internal colonialism.

In addition, internal colonialism is reflected in the extent to which colonial methodologies and principles of political control have been used by African leaders – Africa's modern kings – to ensure that citizens are subjected to their wishes. In essence, the problem of African agency can no longer be attributed to the colonial master but to contemporary indigenous African leaders with an exaggerated sense of entitlement and worth. To them, the empowerment of Africa's people is a form of gifting, not a service they are supposed to offer. They eschew democratic accountability by 'playing fake democracy', to use Beck's term (Beck and Fernandez 2021: 9). They use instruments of state power, including the security apparatus, monetary resources, and bureaucracy, to subdue their people and adulterate democratic processes such as elections. In worst cases, in a manner reminiscent of the beating with a whip as a colonial method of domination, the citizens are usually flogged into submission by the military and other security agencies that, ironically, have the constitutional mandate of protecting them.

Militarisation of political routine is reminiscent of colonial occupation, which leveraged military power (Bayart and Ellis 2000). Violence was central to the colonial matrix of power, related to the institutionalisation of colonial structures of domination (Mignolo 2011: 47). The socialisation of the native to be loyal to the colonial power at different historical moments emphasised the nearness of death. To illustrate, the paradigm of power in the sixteenth century was 'convert to Christianity or I will kill you'. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' callous promise was 'civilise or I will kill you'. The twentieth century's promise was 'develop or I will kill you', and the twenty-first century promise has so far been 'democratise or I will kill you' (Beck and Fernandez 2021: 5). In effect, the colonial paradigm of power, 'I will kill you', has been variously appropriated by African leaders, as manifested in actions that indirectly express the threat of the

nearness of death as an electoral strategy – thus 'vote for me or I will kill you'. Elections have sometimes become war. Still in recent memory, the unprecedented 2008 electoral violence in Kenya claimed approximately 600 lives (Ajuobi 2008).

So, to surmise, the strengthening of African agency requires the mobilisation of citizens to be part of the critical masses to enable what Beck and Fernandez 2021: 10) refer to as the 'road map toward decoloniality through the prism of resistance, innovation and determination'. However, one can hardly imagine a subdued citizenry being enthusiastic about decolonisation and decoloniality, yet they perpetually suffer the internal colonialism of the erstwhile liberators. So, to me, the ever-widening gorge between the interests of the governors and those of the governed is a major problem of African agency. This underlines the need for a philosophical approach to guide internal reflection on African agency. For that matter, I propose the theory of introspection of African agency. It is mapped out as follows:

Stretching the critical theory of introspection

Critical to the proposed theory of introspection of African agency is the question: Why are we the way we are and have been? The preferred answer to this question, as gleaned from the earlier articulated stretches of colonialism and coloniality, has been that: We have been marginalised. To recast, the story of marginalisation has been sustained by painting Africa and Africans in three historical sheds: 1) the slave trade, the transformation of human life into disposable material; 2) colonialism, the domination of the psychical space, and 3) contemporary forms of imperialism, interventionism of the Euro–Atlantic actors (Mignolo 2011: 59). Mbata (2006) suggests apartheid as the fourth shade of intrusion in Africa.

Marginalisation elicits feelings of disrespect, disenfranchisement, disillusionment and dismemberment of the African Self. These feelings are legitimate and an attestation not just to the death but to the continued existence of the African Self, as dramatised by the anti-apartheid activist Dennis Brutus, that:

"Somehow, we survive
and tenderness, frustrated, does not wither
investigating searchlights rake
our naked, unprotected contours;
over our heads the monolithic Decalogue
of fascist prohibition glowers
and teeters for a castrophic fall;
boots club the peeling door
But Somehow, we survive
Severance, deprivation, loss.
Patrols uncoil along the asphalt dark
hissing their menace to our lives
most cruel, all our land is scarred with terror …
but somehow tenderness survives" (Brutus 1964).

The African Self thus suffered multiple fractures inflicted by the external. Despite the intrusion, African agency endures.

The episodes of intrusion were amplified as legitimate forms of engagement. Colonialism was justified as a civilising mission, *la mission civilisatrice* (by France and England). The contemporary liberal-saviour tendencies of the Euro-Atlantic normative order of control are also presented as part of the civilising mission (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009: 135). The pejorative justification of intrusion was that Africa is 'the White Man's burden' (Cox 2000: 218). Hence, the question of African agency is a matter of perception. The protests against intrusion are a result of the perception that Africans have about the interference of external actors. It is generally perceived as subjugation or an attempt at it. But also, the perception that the intruder has about the subjugated or those they intend to subjugate guides the matrix of domination. To the external intruder, subjugation is an intentional undertaking, particularly because it is guided by the question: How will they react? The answer to this question has much to do with the nature and capacity of the target vis-à-vis that of the intruder. If the target is formidable, the intruder will be cautious. If the target is weak, only with the capacity to complain, rant

and wail, the intruder will reign over the target for complete subjugation.

The subjugation of the weak has been the order of international relations. Weaker civilisations surrender to those that are stronger. The Pharaonic Egyptian Civilisation lost its identity to foreign rule. Across different historical moments, it was remodelled to incorporate the identity of the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, and the Arab Caliphate. The Russian Empire was also twice by force Westernised, first by Peter the Great and later by Lenin (Toynbee 1971: 250). In a way, the history of civilisations is entwined with the history of conquests, which can also be described as earlier forms of colonialism. The struggle for African agency ought to be guided by the system of things.

Being formidable is critical for the intruder to subjugate others. Also, for people to keep the intruder at bay, being formidable is a prerequisite to survival. It is not drawn from without (the wish that others will be other-regarding, with pure intentions). It is rather an outcome of the realisation that, regardless of the intentions of the would-be intruder, we can contend with their machinations. In a sense, formidability is a matter of sincere self-examination of one's potentialities. Thenceforth, the intentional examination of the self-organisation of the African Self is what is missing in the matrix of empowerment of African agency. I use the word 'intentional' to amplify 'examination' for the simple reason that there have been attempts aimed at the self-organisation of the African Self, except that the commitment to the realisation of its empowerment is not pursued with sincerity. A. Mazrui (1967: 128) had called for a long period of social and cultural reforms to overcome organisational incompetence in Africa.

Many African leaders have not been intentional in undertaking reforms, including democratic political reforms. Being intentional means being sincere to the African Self and its agency. This elicits the question: what are we doing to ourselves as Africans? And to re-echo Olufemi Taiwo: why have the postcolonial African states failed to deliver the 'promise of modernity'? (Olufemi 2022: 181). Much as I subscribe to the view that progress is a series of innovations, as precisely put by Doxtater (2004: 622–623), I also think fundamentals have to be streamlined. To begin with, Africa must build the capacity for self-organisation. This points to the imperative of actions that matter for the remodelling of the

self-organisation of African agency, which I consider to be the central tenet of the critical theory of introspection of African agency, as briefly sustained in the following stretch.

Central tenet: remodelling the self-organisation of African Agency

The quest for self-organisation of Africans is plagued by several problems, including corruption, failed political transitions, ethnic violence, lack of commitment to industrialisation, limited bureaucratic effectiveness, highhandedness of security agencies, inadequate provision of critical social services, and lack of proper planning for the youth. In most cases, those in leadership have either been overwhelmed or lack the commitment to address the problems that afflict the self-organisation of the African Self. The challenge of self-organisation is historical. In his essay *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983), Achebe decries the problem of self-organisation in Nigeria, which he attributes to the failure of leadership. He further outlines the issues that bedevil self-organisation. He suggests that, through competent leadership, corruption, tribalism, social injustice, the cult of mediocrity and a lack of patriotism can be addressed (Achebe 1960). Many African leaders, to disguise incompetence, have continued to blame the colonial past that divided people along ethnic lines, the interventionism of the West that fuels activism, the citizenry that is unappreciative, the youth that are rowdy, the opposition that is unpatriotic, and a bureaucracy that lacks a sense of direction (Mapuva and Freeman 2010; Nasir 2014).

The theory of the introspection of African agency is therefore a beckoning of scholars to revisit the crisis of leadership in Africa by reflecting on the question: What are our leaders/rulers doing? Are they sincere – true to the amelioration of the African Self as a collective – or just concerned with 'their selves'? It is no longer of functional necessity for African leaders to continue blaming colonialism for the current problems of the African Self. The end of territorial control of African space by colonisers meant that political leadership was bequeathed to Africans. African leaders had the opportunity to reorganise and think anew on how to ameliorate Africans from the wretchedness which colonialism

had inflicted on them. Albeit with visitations of external intrusion, the organisation of Africa largely became 'an endogenous affair' (Fosu 2025: 71). Yet the obsession of African leaders with 'their selves' rather than with the African Self as a collective is glaring. This problem is historical.

The dialogic relationships between precolonial leaders and external actors during the slave trade have been variously recounted. The instructive example is how the Bakongo, Songhai, Zerma, Baluba, Bapembe and Bassa used the colonial system to maintain influence within their respective neighbourhoods (Bayart and Ellis 2000: 222). In contemporary times, many African leaders' obsession with self-aggrandisement and their desire to protect themselves in power has been discussed. Ingram (2007) wonders, 'Why can't African leaders let go [of power]?' Their fraternal rhetoric of commitment to the liberation of the African Self as a collective has been hypocritical. Dramatised by the Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek, postcolonial African leaders *qua* liberators, perceived their rise as an opportunity to be served – to enjoy their moment in the sun, thus:

"And those who have
Fallen into things
Throw themselves into soft beds
But the hip bones of the voters
Grow Painful
Sleeping on the same earth
They slept
Before Uhuru! [independence/liberation]
And they cover the ulcers
On their legs
With animal skins [….]" (Okot 1967: 110).

The leaders live in opulence, but the provision of critical public services such as education and health remain low due to systemic corruption. The rhetoric of commitment to African agency in this way becomes what Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009: 137) refer to as 'a caricature halfway decolonisation'. As corruption and other political ills persist, liberation becomes a hoax. As a result, at the January 2018 African Union Summit

in Addis Ababa, Muhammadu Buhari, the then President of Nigeria, declared corruption 'one of the greatest evils of our time' (Fagbadebo and Dorasamy 2021: 28). It is no wonder, therefore, that many once-praised heroes of African liberation turned villains in their own spaces of control.

Most of the heroes of the agency of the African Self as a collective have subjugated their people, dismembered their societies along ethnic lines, disenfranchised their people, and are presiding over the affairs of disillusioned citizens. The colonial matrix of power entailed a struggle for economic control, a struggle for control of authority, control of the public sphere, and control of knowledge and subjectivity. As stated earlier the African elite matrix of power, to the chagrin of other Africans, has largely mirrored the colonial matrix. High levels of corruption, violence against political opponents, conscription of political discursive zones in the name of public order management, and the censorship of research attest to the extent to which exploitation can wear a Black face (Fanon 1963: 116). The disenchantment that many Africans feel towards their leaders is reminiscent of the anger they had about colonial administrations, yet the post-independence promise was '… to make freedom matter in ways that are different from life under colonial rule' (Fosu 2025: 71). It is because of the excesses of many African leaders that the 'second struggle for freedom' is justified (Olufemi 2022). And now, with the benefit of hindsight, though riddled with racism, the observation by Milverton (1956: 183–184) that nationalism is 'just a craving for power' held a grain of truth. Political organisation has been the failure of African agency. Many Africans are yet to be led by their leaders to what Nkrumah referred to as the 'new Jerusalem, the golden city of our heart's desire'; that is, the liberation of African agency (Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe 1993: 7).

The question of self-organisation of the African Self, therefore, projects a future and a present that is topsy-turvy as a result of the question of leadership. This is more vivid if Africa is compared in terms of progress with the rest of the formerly colonised. Thus the question: why is Asia rising? Why is Latin America rising? Why does Africa remain the symbol of delayed civilisation? The rise of Asia draws much on the extent to which leaders embarked on critical introspection. Sometimes they tapped into other civilisations to draw models to guide internal organisation. Through

a scheme of cross-fertilisation, which has been explained as 'reactive modernisation', polities in Asia have adopted modern state institutions from abroad and grafted them 'on to indigenous rule and a moulded indigenous society' (Therborn 2021: 229).

So, leaders in those spaces have pursued the journey of becoming formidable without necessarily disenfranchising their people or driving them into an unpredictable future of failed political transitions, as the case of Sudan illustrates. Indeed, some of those spaces suffered more protracted forms of external intrusions. Indonesia was colonised for more than 300 years. African leaders' obsession with concentrating on rhetoric against the external is counter to the logic of survival. Vusi Mavimbela, Mbeki's political adviser, while making a case for the AR, suggested that the most important factor behind the Asian miracle was the ability to resist 'cultural westernisation' (Nabudere 2001: 20). I suggest that even the ability to resist cultural domination occurs as a result of having a proper system of self-organisation. This amplifies the imperative of the introspection of African agency. But how do we proceed?

To Kroeber (1953), the meaning of internal organisation draws from the necessity of a distinct language, codified religion, political and military development, economic surplus, technological development, style in terms of fashion and high quality, and originality in arts and scientific progress. The internal strength of European powers enabled them to dominate the world. America's rise to global superiority, China's steady rise to hegemonic standing in the world, the recovery of Japan, the growth of Korea and the Pacific Rim were a result of commitment to political modernity – related to building the institutions of the state, industrialisation, economic and technological advancement, and investment in educational scientific advancement (Stearns et al. 2011).

The story of nuclear Pakistan reveals how internal self-organisation enables agency. Pakistan had long endured the threat of India over the so-called Kashmir question. Pakistan's path to acquiring a nuclear bomb began when India acquired one. The leadership of Pakistan, aware of the imperative of internal strength and the truism that the external (India) does not owe them a living, against all historical odds which cannot be delineated here, ensured that Pakistan became a nuclear-armed state. The then Prime

Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was determined to make Pakistan formidable so that its enemies would shudder (Khalilzad 1976). He was resolute in the quest for nuclear weapons, even if it meant having his people 'eat grass to ensure nuclear parity with India' (Shaikh 2002: 43).

Agency, therefore, begins with internal organisation to build and strengthen it. So, the critical theory of introspection is mobilised around the hypothesis that agency – the strength to act – is internally generated. Once strength is sufficient, the net gain is reflected in the capacity to moderate the excesses of the external environment so as not to undermine one's agency. Agency, in this case, becomes internal strength expressed externally. With internal strength, the actors can easily manipulate the external to accumulate more internal strength. The journey of the world has been punctuated with quests to dominate others as a means of facilitating the continued growth of the powerful. When entities become powerful as a result of the gains made in their internal setting, they start thinking of how best to conquer others (Stearns et al. 2011). Conquest may not necessarily be territorial alienation, as the experience of European colonialism was. It may be economic control, as the dollarisation of the world has played out. So, to make African agency formidable enough to keep at bay all forms of unfavourable intrusions requires the essentialisation of internal organisation and strength, as opposed to decrying the machinations of the external. This invites the question: on what pillars should the theory of introspection of African agency be further anchored to guide the remodelling of internal organisation in Africa? The proposed pillars are discussed as the specific tenet of the theory of introspection below.

The specific tenets of the critical theory of introspection of African agency: a conclusion

I do not intend to exhaustively circumscribe what such a theory should entail as its specific tenets. I can only map out the critical questions that need to be asked in advancing the theory of introspection of African agency thus: what kind of leadership does Africa need? How can African states build functional economies? What education system do we need

in Africa? What system(s) of political organisation do we need to adopt? How can Africa forge a cultural and scientific revolution? How can a nationalistic African population be manufactured?

With regard to the question 'What kind of leadership do we need in Africa?': Within the context of Africa, in most states, the leadership concentrates on identifying problems and blaming them on external actors. Avoiding responsibility and painting an image of vulnerability is characteristic of most African leaders. To them, it is either colonialism or the modern forms of imperialism – the interventionist tendencies of the West – that present a problem to the progress of African agency. Agudiegwu and Amulu (2020) transmits it as the 'blame game syndrome' within the context of Nigeria. The major preoccupation of most African political elites is how to build the capacity to gain and control their power. Trapped by their obsession with dominating others, attaining and keeping power thus becomes the mission, and all things are subservient to it. The national economies mobilised to bolster the leader. The educational system is directed to amplify the ideology of the leader. The bureaucracy is effective to the extent that it executes the plans that support the leaders. Success is measured by the extent to which one wields power, not to serve but to cling to it. The state, as such, becomes the estate of the leader (Wyk 2007). To deepen the estate of the leader, the military has often been misappropriated to serve the interests of the leaders. This has defined the military experience of many African states. And for fear of repression, the criticism of the militarisation of leadership has been mostly dramatised in what is referred to as protest literature – as transmitted, among others, in Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*, Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*, Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (Onanuga 2018: 101).

To further reflect on the institution of a leader, what Africa needs is intentional leadership, which is democratic. One of the most enduring challenges of African agency has been the question of democracy. It has been lately suggested that democracy is in a decline as a result of electoral violence, third-termism and constitutional coups – stretching beyond

the mandatory constitutional limits of a stay in power by tinkering with the Constitutional provisions on term limits, military coups and digital authoritarianism – constraining debate on digital platforms and digital surveillance. Between 2001 and 2020, 15 Heads of State had eliminated term limits: Conté's Guinea in 2001, Eyadema's Togo in 2002, Bongo's Gabon in 2003, Museveni's Uganda in 2005, Déby's Chad in 2005, Biya's Cameroon in 2008, Bouteflika's Algeria in 2008, Guelleh's Djibouti in 2010, Nkurunziza's Burundi in 2015, Kagame's Rwanda in 2015, Nguesso's Republic of Congo in 2015, Kabila's Democratic Republic of Congo in 2016, Azali's Comoros in 2018, Sisi's Egypt in 2019 and Ouattara's Côte d'Ivoire in 2020 (Akinyetun 2022: 104). And because some of Africa's leaders emerged as freedom fighters, they have routinely resisted democracy. Given the cost of their attainment of political power, the perceived sense of entitlement has been overwhelming.

One may argue that democracy is not error-proof and it has its risks. But its beauty ought not to be ignored. Democracy makes politicians accountable. The subjects become powerful members in the selection of leaders and in guiding their mandate, making the public sphere more open and the economy more transparent. Democracy promotes social equity and justice, leading to an open society (Bassey and Udoudon 2018: 2). Political organisation, of course, can also go wrong in a democratic setting, as much as it can in other systems of political organisation. Democracy guarantees and provides safeguards for the political order that other alternatives, such as authoritarianism, may not offer. Because of its democratic deficits, Sudan's fragile political transition has collapsed; the revolution which overthrew Omar al-Bashir turned into war (Kurtz 2024). Libya is in shambles after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. Ethiopia's scientific revolution is being torn apart by enduring ethnic violence. Within the Great Lakes region of Africa, projective narratives of a bleak future with probable failing political transitions are being sustained (Chrétien and Richard 2011). African agency cannot be amplified when we are still grappling with the basics of political order. But amid a grim outlook, where democracy has been embraced, a future of peace and progress has also been projected. The democratic electoral gains in Ghana, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia point to the right civilisational

trajectory in political governance (Thuynsma 2020). Democracy, if embraced, helps to overcome political contradictions through a system of rules. This translates into peace – a predictable future favourable for development. My exposition of the theory of introspection, though not exhaustively pursued in the chapter, should be construed as a reminder that if the question of political governance is not sorted out, efforts aimed at amplifying African agency are likely to go to waste as a result of failed political transitions. A research agenda on political governance and order should be essentialised in the understanding of African agency.

So, the imperative of democracy in streamlining governance is urgent, and it begins with the leader. This is because in instances where leaders have been externally pressurised to pursue democracy, the outcome has been fake democracy. Intentional leadership ought to appreciate that democracy, though dismissed as a Western idea, has its organisational merits. Democracy facilitates the rise of talented leadership to address problems afflicting communities, and the democratic process enables the substitution of the lesser talent (concerning the demands of a particular moment) with little encumbrance. However, for this process to work out, it requires the socialisation of the citizenship to be positioned to decipher the talents that they need in a leader at a particular historical moment. Democracy requires the organisational capacity of the state to socialise citizens to understand the workings of democracy.

Besides democracy, which is critical to the political organisation of states, one of the engines of any civilisation is a functional industrial revolution. Industrialisation enables economic progress, for it powers the export base, which invites the critical financial resources needed to support investment in education, scientific research, infrastructure development and the building of state institutions – including the army and public service. Industrialisation is the anchor of independence, and as a result of a lack of significant progress in industrialisation, the majority of Africa's countries are dependent on financial assistance from the developed world. It is therefore odd that African leaders who decry Western interventionism beg for financial intervention from the West. The excuse has been that Africa is financially dependent on the West, a situation to which most countries are condemned as a result of the unfair

economic policies that the West imposes on the rest of the world. This fits into Achebe's logic that, 'For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry, the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilisation and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa' (Achebe 1978: 13).

So, the thinking is that, by denying goods produced in Africa access to their lucrative Euro–American markets, the West maintains its self-understanding as the most prosperous part of the world, with Africa as the wretched of the earth. This, however, sustains the contradiction expressed in the questions:

1. Who opened the world markets for the Chinese, the Koreans, the Japanese, the Malays, the Indians, among others?
2. How best can African states organise their industrial processes to produce competitive products in terms of quality?
3. How many indigenous, home-grown investors do African states have?
4. What policies do African states have in place to guide investments?
5. What is the extent of the resources that African States have earmarked for scientific industrial research?

Through introspection, answers should be given to these questions. They should be debated to ensure that industrialisation in Africa is well aligned with the promotion of African agency. Indigenously powered industrialisation is the standard mark of self-determination, which cannot be anchored on the industrial fortunes of others.

For that matter, Chinese, Indian, European or Latino investments in Africa ought not to be celebrated but rather taken as springboards to African industrial self-determination. The experience of South-East Asia is useful. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) enabled technological transfer, but industrial capacity has been enabled by indigenous capital. This has been realised through the adoption of the theory of Big Push industrialisation, where governments offer subsidies and build infrastructure such as roads, railway lines, airports and seaports, and offer capital to reduce the exit

of domestic firms from production (Gui-Diby and Benard 2015). The concern is that FDI breeds dependency, exploitation and interference.

Where one's capital flows, cultural and political influence naturally follows. And for the sake of simplicity, one may ask: who is the largest African industrialist in China, India and Brazil for one to argue for foreign investment as an anchor of agency? Industrial indigeneity matters. China's post-1978 industrialisation was anchored in Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs). As a result, rural industries flourished throughout the 1980s. Manufacturing flourished as farmers engaged in small-scale industrial production to supplement their subsistence income from farming. This saw the growth of China's rural industrialisation. It is the indigenous base of manufacturing that saw China at the 'doorstep of detonating an industrial revolution' that has come of age to dominate the world. It took only 10 years, from 1978 to 1988, for China's industrial production to experience monumental growth. We are told that:

> "[T]he number of village firms in China increased more than 12-fold, from 1.5 million to 18.9 million; village industrial gross output increased more than 13.5-fold, from 51.5 billion yuan (14 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP)) to 702 billion yuan (46 per cent of GDP); village employment increased more than 3-fold, from 28 million to 95 million; farmers' aggregate wage income increased 12-fold, from 8.7 billion yuan to 96.3 billion yuan; and village firms' total capital stock increased more than 9-fold, from 23 billion yuan to 210 billion yuan" (Wen 2021: 5).

The lesson to be drawn from China, which is arguably still part of the Global South, is this: industrial independence is critical to a people's pride and voice in international relations. The Chinese can now be listened to, their voice matters because of the industrial base on which their global overreach is anchored. The Africa-wide overreach of South Africa has been enabled by its industrial base, unrivalled on the African continent (Alden and Soko 2005). To thwart Africa's industrial dependency, the strategy should be to support the growth of indigenous industrialists. By strengthening indigenous industrialists, the excesses of foreign

industrialists, which include capital flight, will be moderated. This should not, however, be construed as an argument against foreign investment, but rather a call for indigenous-powered industrialisation as the anchor of Africa's self-determination.

Reflecting on the kind of education system that Africa needs, I would like to submit that one of the things that much of Sub-Saharan Africa is grappling with is how to forge a functional education system. The question of which direction to take in the education sector has not been answered, except that decolonisation of universities has been overemphasised. Education is key, and we were cautioned by Heinrich Veringa, the Dutch Minister of Education during the latter years of the twentieth century, that, 'Every form of one-sided pressure for reform would do damage to the essence of the University' (Meijer 2015: 68). The pedagogical system should be oriented towards Africa's own realities in its concepts and subject matter. Calls for a decolonised pedagogical structure are legitimate, but they should not be pushed into parochialism. Emphasising African realities and drawing illustrations from them should not be construed as an attempt to delink African education systems from other civilisations.

The domestication of concepts and innovations has enabled societies to progress. The university system in the US was derived from the Europeanisation of America, which entailed the importation of the university as a graduate school from Europe. Thus, for the proper domestication of the Europe-dominant Humboldt University model, with teaching and research as the model of university education, the American model added the element of community outreach – a university networked with its communities (Backhaus 2015).

So, no society has progressed because of being inward-looking. Education is about reviewing experiences. Progressive experiences are not restricted to Africa. Africa needs to tap into the experiences of others to grow its civilisation. The charge of colonialism does not mean that all the educational experiences which were bequeathed to us by the coloniser are wrong. Two issues should be distinguished: colonialism as a violent and psychologically disorienting experience and colonialism as a civilisational experience. Considering the violence of colonialism as the basis to dismiss

its civilisational benefits is to be out of touch with the history of modern civilisations. The '… awareness of the Other may be a catalyst for arousing a self-consciousness of one's own civilizational identity' (Cox 2000: 22). Some civilisations have had multiple origins in terms of influence. Western civilisation draws from the Hellenic civilisation of Greece and the Levantine civilisation of West Asia. The Russian civilisation is derived from the Byzantine civilisation of the Romans and Western civilisations. The Carthaginian civilisation of North Africa derives much from the Phoenician and the Greek (Wescott 1970: 73). Of course, some scholars have legitimately suggested that colonialism nipped Africa's civilisation in the bud, and that perhaps Africa would have prospered to compete with the modern civilisations. This is understandable, but not a helpful argument. Colonialism eventually happened. The nascent African civilisation was supplanted. We can only reminisce about that. It is not productive to dwell on it for long. The promotion of African agency lies in harnessing the intelligence and hard work of Africans. Thus, by pointing at the imperative of an organised education system as a facet of the theory of introspection of African agency, I am inviting scholarship to revisit the question of the kind of education system(s) that can enable Africa to forge a cultural and scientific revolution.

Thinking about what kind of education system Africa needs inevitably raises the question of citizenship. It is very hard to imagine a consolidated African Self and its agency when in some states citizenship is still a contested issue. Where colonial boundaries are essentialised, identities at the margins of the boundaries have been excluded from the direct enjoyment of the right to citizenship. The question of Rwandan identity in the Great Lakes Region is instructive, particularly the Banyamulenge question in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and whether they belong to Rwanda or the DRC (Umutoni 2017). Also, the question of building a single multi-ethnic alliance still eludes many states in Africa. In Nigeria, hegemonic struggles over who should be at the helm of the political and economic systems continue to define the relationship between the three dominant ethnic groups: the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Igbo – the 'tripodal ethnic structure' of Nigeria. This has led to

ethnic conflicts attributed to 'unending [ethnic] political manipulation, manoeuvrings, calculations and permutations' (Adegbami and Uche 2015: 61). Very few African states enjoy a single nationalism, and on account of competing nationalisms within a single polity/state, the outcome has been violence and the essentialisation of the formula of ethnic arithmetic that undermines meritocracy as the basis of modern statehood. The most instructive case of postcolonial crafted nationalism is that of Tanzania, where socialism via the Ujamaa policy and Kiswahili as an egalitarian language of Tanzanians enabled the forging of a national identity (Blommaert 1996). In other African states, the move towards a single nationalism has been, to say the least, a patchwork. However, the extent to which constitutionalism has been tweaked to create harmony in ethnic diversity, as in the case of Kenya, does not indicate a permanent solution, but rather a way for those in leadership to bypass their responsibility to fix the problem of failed nationalism (Fitzgerald 2010).

In proposing the critical theory of introspection of African agency, I am beckoning scholars to revisit the question of citizenship to incubate more viable solutions than the shortcut proposals of the political elites in the name of constitutionalism. The questions which should orient scholars in this direction are: what did the states in Asia (where there is ethnic diversity within single states) do to forge a single nationalism? How can we diffuse ethnicity? This will require a comparative study to understand and leverage the experiences of others to grow African agency. The rest are details, and I would like to invite other scholars to contribute to the African journey of introspection.

And finally, for the sake of critical introspection, we need to remind ourselves and our leaders that, 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves'! We need to interrogate ourselves, our actions, our thoughts and sometimes our hypocrisy – manifested in corruption that undermines the provision of critical public services to African citizens and amplifies the extent of the abuse of their rights. We need to proactively pursue an indigenous industrial revolution by investing in human empowerment and industrial scientific research. We should be intentional, remembering that too much talk without action will continue

to render the struggle for African agency an exercise in futility.

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Bagwandeen, Mandira

New South Institute, South Africa

Mandira Bagwandeen is a Visiting Fellow at the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and a Researcher with the New South Institute (NSI). Her research interests include China–Africa relations, Africa's regional integration and development, techno-geopolitics, the geopolitics and geoeconomics of commodities, and South–South cooperation.

Kabwe, Kabaso

Southern Africa Resource Watch, South Africa

Dr Kabaso Kabwe is Programme Manager at the Southern Africa Resource Watch (SARW) and a Research Associate at the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS), University of the Witwatersrand. Her research examines how institutions, public policy and geopolitical dynamics shape Africa's development pathways, with interests in global health, governance and Africa's relations with global powers.

Kasimbu, Japheth Musau

Program Management Specialist, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Djibouti

Japheth Kasimbu is a Program Management Specialist with over 10 years of experience in migration and climate mobility governance. At IGAD, he advances regional mobility and climate resilience initiatives. His expertise spans migration management, peacebuilding, climate resilience and regional integration. Japheth is a PhD candidate in International Studies at the University of Nairobi and a published researcher on climate diplomacy.

Kathukya, Peter Mbuva

University of Nairobi, Kenya

Peter Mbuva Kathukya is a scholar and Part-Time Lecturer in the Department of Diplomacy and International Studies at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. His research interests include African agency in the Global South, technological innovation, international relations, foreign policy, diplomacy, leadership, and electoral governance in Africa.

Kaweesi, Edward

Makerere University, Uganda

Edward Kaweesi is a Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Makerere University. His research interests include political ideas and theory, African agency, and new frontiers of national security.

Kubayi, Mikatekiso

South African Research Chair on African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Dr Mikatekiso Kubayi is a senior researcher at the South African Research Chair on African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy at the University of Johannesburg. He is also a fellow at the Institute for Global Dialogue and a fellow at the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ).

Mpiima, David Mugambe

Makerere University, Uganda

Dr. David Mugambe Mpiima is a Lecturer in the Institute of Gender and Development Studies at Makerere University. He teaches, researches, and publishes on gender, ICTs, energy, social/gender norms, male engagement, politics, and agriculture. Dr. Mpiima is certified in conducting gender audits and in gender and equity budgeting.

Ndeto, Rabecca Kavithe

University of Nairobi, Kenya

Rabecca Kavithe Ndeto is a postgraduate researcher in the Department of Diplomacy and International Studies at the University of Nairobi. Research interests include cultural diplomacy, socio-political relations within the Global South, and pastoralism, conflict, and climate change in the Horn of Africa.

Niringiyimana, Julius

Makerere University, Uganda

Julius Niringiyimana is a lecturer in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Makerere University, where he obtained his PhD. His research interests include the politics of oil and land conflicts in Uganda, natural resource governance, geopolitics, and regional economic integration in Africa.

Sila, Mawia William

University of Nairobi, Kenya

Mawia William Sila is a PhD candidate in International Studies at the University of Nairobi and a communications manager at the African Population and Health Research Center. His interests include international relations, African agency in multilateral forums, policy advocacy, and sustainable development.

Wefwafwa, Job Allan

African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Job Allan Wefwafwa is a Lecturer in Media Studies at the Technical University of Kenya and a Research Associate at the African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand. His research interests lie at the intersection of digital media, African electoral politics, and Afrocentric thought.

Wekesa, Bob

African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Bob Wekesa is the Director of the African Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of the Witwatersrand. His research sits at the intersection of media and communications and geopolitics.

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AFRICA IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH:
ADVANCING AGENCY, AMPLIFYING VOICES

Africa in the Global South: Advancing Agency, Amplifying Voices is the product of a conference held at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, in January 2024, convened to examine the Non-Aligned Movement and Group of 77 (G77) summits. An initiative of the University of the Witwatersrand's African Agency Towards Global Powers project, the book analyses Africa in the Global South from multiple perspectives, rejecting the received wisdom that the Global South is a homogeneous geopolitical bloc. Its interdisciplinary approach aims to deepen our understanding, appreciation and contemplation of Africa in the Global South. If African agency in the Global South is to be enhanced, amplifying African voices through knowledge production is essential. The contributors are established and emerging researchers, and the twelve chapters range from theoretical conceptualisations to specific economic, cultural, social, technological, geopolitical and health issues.



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