

BOOK REVIEW

Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits, editors. *Visions of African Unity: New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 435 pp. Abbreviations. Notes on Contributors. List of Figures. Bibliography. Index. \$139.99. Cloth. ISBN: 978-3030529109.

Visions of African Unity: New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects is a collection of sixteen chapters edited by Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits. The individual chapters are authored by scholars with expertise in African studies and profound knowledge of African regionalism. The book is divided into four parts discussing systematically the visions of African unity by focusing on emerging perspectives on the historical trajectory of pan-African unification initiatives. It relies on conceptual frameworks developed by international relations scholars and sociologists such as stability theory and dependency theory to analyze the primary data generated from interviews and to interpret secondary data sourced from newspaper articles and archival documents.

In the introduction, the editors try to differentiate between narrow and broad definitions of Pan-Africanism, tracing the history of Pan-Africanism, African unity, and continental integration. They note that the idea of Pan-Africanism emerged in the late eighteenth century, when educated elites in Africa and the diaspora began to debate different visions of African unity. These debates were given practical and scholarly expressions in the various Pan-African Congresses in 1919, 1921, and 1927. Pan-Africanism, through these congresses, eventually transformed into a political philosophy, leading to various attempts at achieving continental and regional integration during the immediate post-independence era. The compromise between the more radical Nkrumah's Casablanca bloc, which preferred immediate unification, and the Monrovia bloc, which suggested a more gradual approach, resulted in the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. Yet subsequent pan-African unification projects have continued to divide African scholars into Afro-optimists and Afro-pessimists.

The first part brings into conversation the various debates and ideas of pan-African unity, federation, integration, and regionalism with respect to Ghana-Togo relations, trade union federation, Mali-Senegal integration, and

East African regionalism. It outlines the roles of state actors and non-state actors (NSAs) in fostering pan-African integration. Recognizing the impediments of politics of the Cold War era and the non-alignment movement, it also discusses the failure of Kwame Nkrumah's pan-African trade union movement to unite African workers toward radical and fundamental socio-economic and political transformation of the continent. It further emphasizes the grassroots initiative to facilitate cooperation, unification, and bottom-top integration of French West Africa.

Part Two appraises the impact of African liberation movements in Southern Africa and Cold War politics on African unity and integration during the Cold War era. It demonstrates how liberation and the decolonization struggle against Portuguese colonialism contributed to Pan-Africanism and strengthened pan-African unity and solidarity. More specifically, this part examines the influence of continental networks and regional institutions on the national liberation wars in Botswana. It also highlights the influence of Anglo-American diplomacy within the context of the Cold War era on the resolutions and actions of the OAU Consultative Committee toward the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). It further points out the role of anti-colonial militants in liberating, founding, and uniting the new Maghreb region as well as decolonizing and emancipating Africa's minds.

The third part traces the historical trajectories of African regionalism, focusing on the transition from the OAU to the African Union (AU) that took place in 2002. It begins by highlighting the various peace norms and security architecture of the OAU between 1963 and 1993. This part also discusses security policy inconsistencies, discontinuities, and reversals between the OAU and the AU. It thus provides in-depth and detailed studies of security aspects of the OAU/AU. It assesses the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights twenty years after the Ouagadougou Protocol, further reflecting on the implication of the ambivalent AU's collective identity formation for contemporary African politics and unity with reference to the 2015 Burundi conflict. It finally suggests possible ways to unite or integrate Africa going forward.

The fourth and last part identifies and discusses key primary sources from the OAU and the AU, from the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) to the AU Agenda 2063. This part notes that the OAU documents can be accessed from AU archives in Addis Ababa as well as various national archives of AU member states. It points out that the improvement in archival accessibility and research approaches can result in the discovery of new ways of understanding the history and future of African unity and innovative research on African integration in the twenty-first century. However, for a book published in 2020 on the visions of pan-African unity and integration, one would have expected this part of the book to address the implication of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for African unity.

By engaging African scholars to contribute chapters in this book, the editors have responded to the plea to decolonize knowledge production. This is imperative for overcoming the existing academic hierarchies which

tend to exclude African academics from scholarly conversation. The book is an impressive addition to African regionalist literature and represents a conscious attempt to expand the frontiers of knowledge. However, it is itself a product of the ceaseless search for truth and unending debates on African regionalism between the contending Afro-optimist and Afro-pessimist scholars, and the emerging third force—the Afro-realist scholars. It is not the end of discussion, as discussion continues. The book has therefore triggered further scholarly debate, stimulated intellectual discourse, and deepened academic conversation around African regionalism. It serves as a useful reading for undergraduate students and (post)graduate students in history, political science and international relations. It is also a vital source of research materials for further studies for (post)graduate students and post-doctoral researchers in the field of African studies, as well as African history, politics, and regionalism.

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