

Introduction, or: On the Genre of OAU/AU Anniversary Publications, 1963–2023

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This special issue of *Comparativ* is published at the crossroad of the 60th anniversary of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, established on 25 May 1963) and the 20th anniversary of its successor, the African Union (AU, launched on 10 July 2002).¹ While the former was primarily concerned with the protection of the newly won independence of its member states as well as fighting apartheid and continued European colonialism, the latter is very much concerned with integrating the African continent into processes of globalization as well as addressing widespread issues of terrorism and violent extremism, unconstitutional changes of government (inter alia, coups d'état), and other governance challenges. After the OAU was transformed into the AU, the new AU Commission which had replaced the OAU's rather small secretariat became a vibrant actor in its own right. Although member states did not really cede sovereignty to the commission, the latter pushed some new agendas and developed the union's policies. The Pan-African project was successfully relaunched, and some common positions developed which allowed the continent, at least on some global issues (such as the UN Security Council reform, or "development"), to speak with one voice. In other fields, important policies have been codified and institutionalized – for instance on democracy, elections, and governance, but also on women rights –, and policy implementation has been further professionalized.² However, the on-

1 Yet somewhat out of sync the African Union is also commemorating 9 September as the 20th anniversary of the Sirte meeting in Libya which kind of started the transition from OAU to AU. See African Union, Press Release, 8 August 2022, https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/42096-pr-PR_AU_AT_20_-_EN.pdf (accessed 28 February 2023).

2 On the current anniversary some insightful media comments have been published. For a selection, see C. C. Nshimbi, The African Union at 20: some reason to cheer, but lots of work ahead, The Conversation [Mel-

going institutional and financial reform of the African Union also indicates that there is still need for making the continental body more efficient and effective, and less dependent on international partners and their regular financial contributions to programme implementation or AU-led peace support operations. And, finally, the ambition to become a “people’s union” so far has remained a promise rather than a reality.

1. Academic Anniversary Literature

Anniversaries of international organizations usually don’t go unnoticed.³ However, academic attention to these events also seems to correlate with the perceived relevance of the institution in question by publishing houses or journal editors. It is therefore not surprising that the anniversary literature on the OAU/AU is not very extensive. Yet there is an interesting body of literature to which this special issue aspires to contribute.

In the genre of OAU/AU commemoration literature, a class of its own are the regular anniversary reminders in the annual compendium *Africa Contemporary Record* (ACR) which back in the day was published by the South African journalist Colin Legum (1919–2003).⁴ Though usually not really engaging in detailed analysis of the challenges and performance of the continental body from an anniversary perspective, two major observations were shared throughout the years. First, on the continental body’s 10th anniversary in 1973, Zdenek Červenka (1928–2002) explicitly addressed the widespread scepticism around the OAU: “There is indeed no other international organization which has survived more predictions about its imminent collapse and disintegration than the OAU”.⁵ And second, on the 25th anniversary of the OAU, Legum rightfully stressed:

bourne], 3 July 2022, <https://theconversation.com/the-african-union-at-20-some-reason-to-cheer-but-lots-of-work-ahead-183651>; B. van Eysen/K. Hairsine, At 20, African Union has achieved much but the work goes on, Deutsche Welle [Bonn], 9 July 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/at-20-african-union-has-achieved-much-but-the-work-goes-on/a-62402801>; T. O. Falk, AU’s 20th anniversary brings mixed feelings on continental legacy, Al Jazeera [Doha], 12 July 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/7/12/aus-20th-anniversary-brings-mixed-feelings-on-continental-legacy> (all accessed 28 February 2023).

3 See, for instance, the 75th anniversary volume by the United Nations, *Achieving Our Common Humanity: Celebrating Global Cooperation through the United Nations*, New York 2020. And for an academic counterpart, see A. J. Lyon et al. (eds.), *The 75th Anniversary of the United Nations. Looking Back and Looking Forward*, in: *Global Governance* 26 (2020) 1, pp. 96–112.

4 Z. Červenka, *The Tenth Anniversary of the OAU*, in: C. Legum (ed.), *Africa Contemporary Record. Annual Survey and Documents 1973–1974*, vol. 6, London 1974, pp. A29–33; Z. Červenka/C. Legum, *The Organization of African Unity in 1978: The Challenge of Foreign Intervention*, in: C. Legum (ed.), *Africa Contemporary Record. Annual Survey and Documents 1978–1979*, vol. 11, New York/London 1980, pp. A25–39. See also C. Legum, *The OAU after Twenty Years. The Record of Failures and Successes*, in: C. Legum (ed.), *Africa Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents 1983–1984*, vol. 16, New York/London 1985, pp. A61–79; C. Legum, *The Organization of African Unity in 1988: A Quarter of a Century of Progress and Disappointment*, in: C. Legum (ed.), *Africa Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents 1988–1989*, vol. 21, New York/London 1992, pp. A44–55; C. Legum, *The Organization of African Unity. Facing Up to the Failures of its Mediation Efforts*, in: C. Legum (ed.), *Africa Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents 1992–94*, vol. 24, New York/London 2000, pp. A33–38.

5 Červenka, *The Tenth Anniversary of the OAU*, p. A29.

*It requires a capacity to think in historical terms about the nature of political processes – that is, not to make final judgements about developments over a short term – to evaluate the importance of the OAU in the difficult post-independence era. While there is much to criticize in its performance, there is a reason for encouragement.*⁶

The same, I guess, holds true for the African Union. It is still far too early to conclude on the institution.

During its early years, not much attention was devoted to OAU anniversaries. Belatedly, in 1976, Yassin El-Ayouty, at the time an Egyptian senior political affairs officer with the United Nations, published an edited volume on the 10th anniversary with an introduction by Nigerian OAU assistant secretary-general Peter Onu (1931–1997) and contributions by, among others, the doyen of the US political science research on Africa, Ira William Zartman, but also by the later UN secretary-general Boutros-Boutros Ghali as well as Jon Woronoff, the editor of the phenomenal *African Historical Dictionaries series*.⁷ One round anniversary later there was another edited collection, this time by El-Ayouty and Zartman.⁸ On this occasion, there was also a second edited volume, produced quite prominently by a Nigerian academic trio.⁹ They took stock of issues such as decolonization, “conflict control”, “development”, and human rights, and made suggestions for improvements.

Expectedly the 25th anniversary, or silver jubilee, of the OAU caught some more attention. Worth mentioning are the special issues of the *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs*, edited by R. A. Akindele, and *Africa Today*, edited by Amare Tekle.¹⁰ There were also two editions with reprinted documents, essays loosely connected to the event, and interviews.¹¹ For the 30th anniversary, El-Ayouty published his third volume on the issue; three of the twelve contributions discussed questions of peace and security.¹² The following anniversaries seem to indicate a loss of relevance and/or interest in the OAU. No publications could be traced for the 35th and 40th OAU anniversaries in 1998 and 2003, respectively. And rather late, the 45th anniversary was picked up in just one short article.¹³ Academic production on OAU/AU anniversaries finally thrived with the 50th anniversary of the organization in 2013 – and with substantial interest in South Africa in particular.¹⁴

6 Legum, *Africa Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents 1988–1989*, vol. 21, p. A46.

7 Y. El-Ayouty, *The Organization of African Unity after Ten Years: Comparative Perspectives*, New York 1976.

8 Y. El-Ayouty/I. W. Zartman, *The OAU after Twenty Years*, New York 1984.

9 A. Sesay/O. Ojo/O. Fasehun, *The OAU after Twenty Years*, Boulder 1984.

10 See R. A. Akindele (ed.), *The Organization of African Unity 1963–1988: A Role Analysis and Performance Review*, in: *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs* 14 (1998) 1, pp. 1–353, with a visionary contribution by, among others, H. Assisi Asobie on the OAU in the year 2000. See also A. Tekle, *The Organization of African Unity at Twenty-Five Years: Retrospect and Prospect*, in: *Africa Today* 35 (1988) 3/4, pp. 7–20.

11 A. Césaire, *Dossier: XXVe anniversaire de l'Organisation de l'Unité Africaine (1963–1988)*, in: *Presence africaine* 146 (1988), pp. 3–106; K. Krafona, *Organization of African Unity: 25 Years on. Essays in Honour of Kwame Nkrumah*, London 1988.

12 Y. El-Ayouty (ed.), *The Organization of African Unity after Thirty Years*, Westport 1994.

13 V. O. Edo/M. A. Olanrewaju, *An Assessment of the Transformation of the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U.) to the African Union (A.U.), 1963–2007*, in: *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 21 (2012) 1, pp. 41–69.

14 This was preceded by a late, late publication on the 5th anniversary of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) which was launched in May 2004. See T. Murithi/H. Lulie (eds.), *The African Union Peace and Security Council: A*

The by now dissolved Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) published a critical review of the state of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), relations between the AU and the European Union, questions of governance, and Africa in Global Politics.¹⁵ The journal *Africa Insight* (Pretoria) released a special issue, mainly written by South African authors, including former president Thabo Mbeki.¹⁶ South African academic Mammo Muchie came up with a series of three edited volumes inspired by a specific reading of Pan-Africanism.¹⁷ Furthermore, an edited volume was published which was based on post-graduate work.¹⁸ In addition, a short article came out on the OAU's "development" paradigm as well as a more substantive reflection by Gambia's former permanent representative to the AU (2002–2007) and today's president of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, 2022–2026), Omar A. Touray.¹⁹ All in all, the genre of anniversary publications on the OAU/AU is diverse in content, often descriptive, and even more often quite normative (for instance, in terms of the kind of Pan-Africanism that should be pursued by the continental body). The genre has been driven by very few committed individuals with a longstanding interest in the topic (such as Colin Legum, or Yassin El-Ayouty), or institutions that for promotional reasons feel that they "have" to pronounce themselves on this topic in the academic-cum-advisory market (be it the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria, or the former Centre for Conflict Resolution in Cape Town). Yet despite the many publications on various issues related to the African Union, there hardly is a regular and rigorous *academic* monitoring and analysis of the African Union.²⁰

2. O/AU Commemoration Culture

Let's briefly look at how the continental body itself has slowly established a commemoration culture.²¹ And to be honest, in the early years the OAU was not that good at

Five-Year Appraisal, Pretoria 2013. On the occasion of the AU's 10th anniversary, the London-based New African magazine produced a special issue: 46 (2012) 519, pp. 10–41.

15 A. Adebayo/M. Paterson (eds.), *The African Union at Ten: Problems, Progress and Prospects*. International Colloquium Report. 30–31 August 2012, Berlin/Cape Town 2013.

16 See C. Landsberg, *Reflections on the African Union after Decade One. Looking Back in Order to Look Forward*. Introduction to *Africa Insight* special issue *The African Union at 10 years* 42 (2012) 3, pp. 1–12.

17 M. Muchie/M. P. Matlou/S. Osha (eds.), *The Africana World: From Fragmentation to Unity and Renaissance*, Pretoria 2012; M. Muchie/P. Lukhele-Olorunju/O. B. Akpor (eds.), *The African Union Ten Years After. Solving African Problems with Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance*, Braamfontein 2013; M. Muchie et al. (eds.), *Unite or Perish: Africa Fifty Years After the Founding of the OAU*, Pretoria 2014.

18 S. S. Mutanga et al. (eds.), *Africa at a Crossroads: The Continent's Future Prospects for Africa after 50 Years of the Organisation of African Unity/African Union*, Pretoria 2018.

19 C. Twala, *The 50 Years Struggle of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU): A Search for a Developmental Paradigm in Africa?*, in: *Journal of Social Sciences* 39 (2014) 1, pp. 103–109; O. A. Touray, *The African Union: The First Ten Years*, Lanham 2016.

20 For a rare exception, see U. Engel (ed.), *Yearbook on the African Union*, vol. 2 (2021), Leiden/Boston 2022. And, of course, there are some well written general analyses of the Union.

21 With great gratitude, I would like to acknowledge the work of Stephen Mayega (acting AU chief archivist) who searched the AU Archives for relevant sources and added some scans to the AU Common Repository. E-mail communication, 3 August, 8 August, and 25 August 2022.

staging these jubilees. In preparation of the 10th anniversary in May 1973, the Council of Ministers decided in 1971 to establish a programme committee to plan and organise activities for the celebrations.²² It concentrated on the following activities: (1) producing of a film; (2) minting commemorative medallions; (3) issuing commemorative stamps; (4) printing and publishing of post-cards, brochures, and posters; (5) organising cultural and folkloristic events; (6) organising sports and workers' events; (7) considering a list of invitees; (8) integrating the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the conference of African labour ministers; and preparing a declaration.²³

The movie caused the organiser's a bit of a headache: international producers were excluded, continental ones basically not interested or capable. Finally, an Egyptian producer based in Addis Ababa was contracted for \$200,000. Furthermore, the organization of a soccer tournament failed because of lack of interest among member states.²⁴

In the end, the Council of Ministers came up with a *Solemn Declaration on General Policy*, elaborating on the OAU's main policies regarding ending colonialism, confronting forms of neo-colonialism and fighting apartheid.²⁵ The declaration did not really leave a mark in the history of the organization, which after ten years admittedly was not that active beyond the issue of apartheid and decolonization. In fact, because of the post-colonial rise of authoritarian regimes on the continent as well as increasing political and military confrontation among member states, after ten years the pan-Africanist project was at its low.²⁶ The jubilee summit was only attended by ten out of then 41 heads of state and government.²⁷

22 OAU Executive Council, Decision on the Tenth Anniversary of the OAU. Adopted at the 17th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 15–19 June 1971. CM/Res. 258/Rev.1 (XVII). The necessary approval by both Assembly and Council of Ministers, however, was not part of the official documentation of the respective meetings.

23 OAU Council, Report on the Activities of the Programme Committee on the Celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the OAU (May 1973). Adopted at the 20th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 5–10 February 1973. CM/476, p. 2. See AU Common Repository, <https://archives.au.int/handle/123456789/7748>. The (enlarged) committee was made up of representatives from Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. Some of the posters produced in member states can be seen in the US Library of Congress' Yanker Poster Collection. See <https://www.loc.gov/item/yan1996002205/PP/>. An example of an Algerian post stamp on the anniversary can be seen at <https://www.dreamstime.com/moscow-russia-october-postage-stamp-printed-algeria-devoted-to-th-anniversary-organization-african-unity-oau-serie-image201582561> (all accessed 28 February 2023).

24 Only Cameroon, Mali, Somalia, and Upper Volta (today's Burkina Faso) expressed a keen interest.

25 OAU Council, Solemn Declaration on General Policy. Adopted at the 21st Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 17–24 May 1973. CM/ST.9 (XXI). At that time, the following territories were still considered to be under colonial rule: "Angola, Guinea Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Rhodesia, the Comoro Islands, the so-called French Somali Coast (Djibouti)[,] the so-called Spanish Sahara, the Seychelles Islands and the Islands of Sao Tome and Principe." Interestingly, the text was drafted as a declaration of heads of state and government, dated 25 May 1973. However, the following summit did not pass this text.

26 See U. Engel, The Organisation of African Unity in the 1960s: From Euphoria to Disenchantment, in: *Comparativ* 29 (2019) 4, pp. 48–67, here pp. 65–67.

27 See British Pathé, Reuters archive. <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVAC6NNKTGUVD2C053R7IB37C5P5-ETHIOPIA-AFRICAN-LEADERS-ARRIVE-IN-ADDIS-ABABA-FOR-TENTH-SUMMIT/query/Addis> (accessed 28 February 2023). – For lack of space, the following anniversaries are skipped. However, things started looking better at the silver jubilee in 1987 and the 30th anniversary in 1993, respectively. Member states started becoming more

A genre in its own right are congratulation messages by mainly non-African heads of state and government to the OAU. Based on just this material, a wonderful article on the global condition of the time could be written.²⁸

ALL AFRICA CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES

CON/AHG/33

May 19, 1973

His Excellency Nzo Ekangaki
Secretary-General
Organization of African Unity
P.O. Box 324
Addis Ababa
ETHIOPIA

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

On behalf of the member churches of the All Africa Conference of Churches and in my own name, I send to the member states and governments and to you our most heartfelt greetings and felicitations on the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity.

Ten years is not a long time in a life of any organization. However, during this period the Organization of African Unity has made many outstanding contributions to the development of African Unity as well as the general well-being of the African peoples. Cynics are inclined to assess the significance of the Organization of African Unity in terms of the achievements of its stated political objectives only. Even here it cannot be denied that while the organic union of our nations either on a regional or continental basis remains a goal to be pursued, there is the intangible fact that today Africans know one another better, feel closer to each other and are inspired by the common ideals enunciated by the Organization of African Unity. The very fact that every year the majority of our Heads of State and Government meet together to deliberate upon our common future as Africans is a unique phenomena in contemporary international relations of incalculable importance.

Besides, there is an impressive list of initiatives and achievements in the cultural, scientific and economic fields for which the Organization of African Unity can feel justly proud.

You have survived these ten years in spite of many crises, notable among them being the civil wars in Nigeria and Zaïre and the question of dialogue with South Africa. The quiet assistance that I personally received from the OAU Secretariat when I was negotiating the Sudan Peace Agreement, while not generally recognized, was certainly a tremendous factor in enabling us to attain the negotiated peace.

The future is hope-full and promising. These past ten years have proven that many of the problems that were considered as unsurmountable in 1963 have now been overcome. All of Africa will be free within the next ten years!

Message from the All Africa Conference of Churches, 19 May 1973²⁹

committed to the organization which between 1989 and 2001 was managed by a very strong and visionary secretary-general, Tanzania's Salim A. Salim. See OAU Assembly, 1993 Cairo Declaration on the Occasion of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Organization of African Unity. Adopted at the 29th Ordinary Session of the OAU Assembly held in Cairo, Egypt, on 28–30 June 1993. AHG/Decl.1 (XXIX). On the 35th anniversary, see OAU, The OAU: 35 Years in the Service of Africa. Publ. on Behalf of the Organisation of African Unity by Saffron Walden, Essex 1997. This was a handbook type of publication, "the first of its kind since the inception of the OAU [...]"

28 See <https://archives.au.int/handle/123456789/10276> (accessed 28 February 2023).

29 OAU, Messages Received by the Secretariat on the Occasion of Celebration of the 10th OAU Anniversary, Addis Ababa: Organisation of African Unity Secretariat 1973, CON/AHG/33.

CON/AHG/33
Page 2

The All Africa Conference of Churches which is also celebrating its Tenth Anniversary this year, feels the deepest gratitude for the very close and fraternal relations that exist between our two organizations. We have every confidence that these relations will be further developed and strengthened in the years ahead.

For our part we are deeply committed to work for reconciliation across all the barriers that now menace the unity of our nations and the African people. We hope that in this the Organization of African Unity might become more deeply involved, in spite of the provision of the Charter concerning non-interference in the affairs of member states. But there is a valuable African tradition which allows for brotherly counsel and mediation that the Organization of African Unity should not easily relegate into a doctrinaire legalism. Those who desire peace must pursue it! Consequently we would hope to see the Organization of African Unity more dynamically involved in helping our nations to overcome the evils of tribalism and sectionalism that are mainly responsible for the tragic situation in which so many of our people find themselves as refugees. The African refugee has no place to go except back home. We pledge ourselves to be at your service, not only in ameliorating the harsh conditions under which men, women and children are forced to flee from persecution and murder, but especially in working with you to remove the causes of internal strife within our nations.

It is in this spirit that I have the honour to forward to you a Cheque in the amount of US\$10,000 to be used by the OAU Liberation Committee in effectuating reconciliation among the Zimbabwe liberation movements. This amount has been contributed by the member churches of the All Africa Conference of Churches. We are convinced of the justice of the cause for which the liberation movements in Zimbabwe are today laying down their lives. We recognize that were it not for the efforts of our national leaders to achieve political independence for our nations, as churches we too would still be under the domination of foreign missionaries. So we hope that this token amount will serve to encourage those who are fighting for justice, humanity and peace in Zimbabwe as well as assure them of the fullest support of the Christian Church in Africa.

Let me assure you that the All Africa Conference of Churches is totally committed to the proposition that religious differences should not serve to polarize African nations and societies. We are prepared to work with men of any religious faith and of no religious faith in the cause of African Unity, human development, self-reliance, justice and peace.

May God bless the Organization of African Unity with new inspiration, courage and vision of a race of man united in justice and peace and with an abundance of grace to rededicate yourselves to fulfill the dreams our fathers before us have dreamed.

Yours very sincerely

Burgess Carr
General Secretary

Encl.
BG/bo

A similar mix of merchandising items was also produced for the 25th anniversary of the organization in 1988: From a documentary movie (sold as VHS video cassettes) to OAU calendars, from stickers and posters to T-shirts.³⁰ This time around a small “football tournament”, the “25th anniversary cup”, materialized: Nigeria beat Ethiopia, and the OAU team that of the UN Economic Commission for Africa. A planned film week to be held in Addis Ababa was cancelled because “there were not enough films to make the

30 See OAU, Final Report of the Programme Committee on the Celebration of the 25th OAU Anniversary, 1988. RPT/CTTE/OAU.25 AN (XII). <https://archives.au.int/handle/123456789/10277> (accessed 28 February 2023). See also PANA (ed.), OAU. 25 Years. Independence and Liberation, Dakar 1988; OAU Assembly, Resolution on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the OAU. Adopted at the 23rd Ordinary Session of the OAU Assembly held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 27–29 July 1987. AHG/Res. 170 (XXIII).

holding of the Film Week profitable".³¹ May be the biggest and longest lasting success of the 25th anniversary was the renovation of the staff cafeteria: The government of the People's Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) paid for its renovation, and the building was renamed "Congo Hall".³²

CON/AHG/41(X)

Dear Friends,

On the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the establishment of the Organization of African Unity I wish to extend to the participants in the Conference, on behalf of the peoples and Government of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and in my own personal name, the most cordial greetings.

The Organization of African Unity, through its existence and the past work, has become a very strong pillar of the peoples of Africa in the defence of their vital interests, the safeguarding of their freedom and independence and the promotion of mutual cooperation, and in the struggle against all forms of foreign domination and forces of colonialism, apartheid and racial discrimination which, regrettably continue to exist on the African soil as an anachronism of the contemporary era to this very day.

The strenuous efforts exerted by the countries of the African continent with a view to realising the century-old aspirations of their peoples for freedom, emancipating and development, have already yielded very outstanding results. By exerting active efforts for peace and equitable cooperation among states, the countries of Africa are rendering a major contribution to the cause of the international community and represent an important factor in the contemporary international relations.

I am convinced that the Organisation of African Unity, will in the future also make efforts towards implementing the aims of its charter and that the present anniversary will give new impetus to this end.

Message from Josip Broz Tito, President of Yugoslavia³³

31 OAU, Final Report of the Programme Committee, para. 40.

32 OAU, Final Report of the Programme Committee, para. 54.

33 OAU, Messages Received by the Secretariat on the Occasion of Celebration of the 10th OAU Anniversary, Addis Ababa: Organisation of African Unity Secretariat 1973, CON/AHG/41.

CON/AHG/41(X)

Page 2

Please accept, Dear Friends, my sincere wishes for fruitful work and for the further strengthening and new successes of the Organization of African Unity.

Josip Broz Tito

Both the 10th and the 25th anniversaries were in stark contrast to the golden jubilee of the OAU/AU in 2013. First, 2013 was declared as the *Year of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance*.³⁴ It inspired the institution to reflect upon 50 years of its Pan-African project and how to craft the way for the next 50 years. As a result, heads of state and government framed their common vision of the continent in *Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want* which has become the most important point of reference for the African Union.³⁵ The anniversary also came with the very professional branding campaign “I am African. I am the African Union (For a peaceful, prosperous and united Africa)”.³⁶ Furthermore, it is worth noting that the African Union, among others, has also celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Peace and Security Council (25 May, and 25 June 2014), the PSC’s 1000th meeting (25 May 2021) as well as the 20th anniversary of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) which is a voluntarily mechanism on governance in member states.³⁷ For the current 20th anniversary of the African Union, the continental body, *inter alia*, has launched an “AU 20 Artists & Writers Residency Programme”. While five writers will be hosted by the Library of Africa and the African Diaspora (LOATAD) in Accra,

34 AU Assembly, Decision on the Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Establishment of the Organization of African Unity. Adopted at the 18th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 29–30 January 2012. Assembly/AU/Dec.412 (XVIII). See also AU Assembly, Decision on the Progress Report on the Implementation of Assembly Decision (Assembly/AU/Dec.412 (XVIII)) on the Preparations for the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU on 25th May 2013. Adopted at the 19th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly held Addis Ababa Ethiopia, on 15–16 July 2012. Assembly/AU/Dec.422 (XIX).

35 See AU Assembly, 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration. Adopted at the 21st Ordinary Session of the Assembly of African Heads of State and Government held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 26 May 2013; and AU Commission, *Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want*. Popular Version, Addis Ababa: AU Commission, 2015.

36 See also AU Echo, *The Africa We Want*. Special Issue for the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU 1963–2013, Addis Ababa: African Union, pp. 21 and 39. <https://archives.au.int/handle/123456789/10275> (accessed 28 February 2023).

37 AU PSC, Press Statement, issued after the 437th PSC meeting held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 25 May 2014, PSC/PR/BR. (CDXXXVII); AU PSC, Communiqué, issued after the 1000th PSC meeting held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 25 May 2021, PSC/PR/COMM (1000[2021]); AU PSC, Declaration on the Tenth Anniversary of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. Adopted at the 444th PSC meeting held at the level of heads of state and government in Malabo, Equatorial-Guinea, on 25 June 2014. PSC/HSG/Dec. (CDXLIV); and African Union, Decision on the Reports of 30th and 31st Forums of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Adopted at the 35th AU Assembly held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 5–6 February 2022. Assembly/AU/Dec. 818 (XXXV), §29.

Ghana, the five visual artists will be based at the Loman Art House in Dakar, Senegal, for the residency programme.³⁸

3. Structure of the Special Issue on the O/AU@60

Against this backdrop, this volume brings together different academic perspectives on the African Union. In the first section, the Leipzig-based historian Geert Castryck discusses the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) as an African reclaiming of an imperial spatial order that had underpinned both colonial Africa and an international world order in the decades preceding independence. The OAU is seen through the lens of African countries relating to the post-colonial international world order and international resistance against a reigning world order.

In the second section Timothy Murithi, head of programme at the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in Cape Town and extraordinary professor of African Studies at University of the Free State, reviews the African Union's institutional changes, contestation and consolidation. His focus is on the significant challenges and opportunities for Africa to strive to realize its full potential in terms of consolidating peace and development, in terms of Pan-African solidarity and self-determination, as envisioned in Agenda 2063. Among others, he discusses the African Union Transitional Justice Policy, the African Union's policy coordination role vis-à-vis the Covid-19 pandemic, the African Continental Free Trade Area and the AU Protocol on the Free Movement of People. In the third section Gilbert M. Khadiagala, professor of political science at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, reviews the progress of the African Union in peacebuilding through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). He argues that meaningful improvements in its related institutions should focus on whether some of them can be recalibrated to meet specific needs while others are accorded a low priority. Furthermore, he calls for a sober reassessment of what has worked and what has not worked in the 20 years since the APSA has been launched.

And finally, in the last section of this anniversary volume, Jens Herpolsheimer (Research Centre Global Dynamics, Leipzig University) dissects the division of labour between the African Union and the regional economic communities (RECs). Based on interviews and archival work, he develops one of the very rare insights into how AU-REC relations work more generally, beyond situations of active conflict interventions, and in the context and as part of everyday practices and sense-making of actors at the AU and the RECs, as well as at different sites (this is exemplified with a focus on the relation between the AU and the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS).

38 AU Information & Communication Directorate, Press Release, 4 November 2022. There is also an extensive ISS publication on this occasion: W. Okumu/A. Atta-Asamoah (eds.), *The African Union at 20: African Perspectives on Progress, Challenges and Prospects*, Pretoria 2023.