

Imagining African Unity: From an Inter-Imperial Spatial Order to an International Organization

Geert Castryck

ABSTRACTS

African unity has been imagined and implemented from the outside, by colonial and anti-colonial forces alike before it was taken up by newly independent African states. The argument is developed in three steps: first, an imperial imagination of Africa as a unity informed the colonization of Africa. Then follows an analysis of the failure of this endeavor and of the two-tongued afterlife of this failure: colonial reforms that laid the institutional ground for territorial nation-states and a transcontinental anti-imperial liberation movement. Finally, the OAU can be understood as both the outcome of this decolonizing liberation movement and of the attempt to ensure Africa's integration in an international world order. Territory, Martian state, international organization, and African unity are the guiding principles running through this article, combining strands from the history of colonialism, international history, and African history.

Die afrikanische Einheit wurde zunächst von außen, sowohl von kolonialen als auch von antikolonialen Kräften, imaginiert und umgesetzt, bevor sie von den neuen unabhängigen afrikanischen Staaten aufgegriffen wurde. Das Argument wird in drei Schritten entwickelt. Erstens, die Kolonisierung Afrikas wurde durch eine imperiale Vorstellung von Afrika als Einheit untermauert. Zweitens folgt eine Analyse des Scheiterns dieses Bestrebens und des zweischneidigen Nachlebens dieses Scheiterns: koloniale Reformen, die den institutionellen Boden für territoriale Nationalstaaten legten einerseits, und eine transkontinentale antiimperiale Befreiungsbewegung andererseits. Drittens kann die OAU sowohl als Ergebnis dieser dekolonisierenden Befreiungsbewegung als auch als Versuch, die Integration Afrikas in eine internationale Weltordnung zu verwirklichen, verstanden werden. Territorium, marsianischer Staat, internationale Organisation und afrikanische Einheit sind die Leitgedanken, die sich durch diesen Artikel ziehen, in dem Stränge aus der Geschichte des Kolonialismus, der internationalen Geschichte und der afrikanischen Geschichte kombiniert werden.

1. Introduction

Africa is an invention.¹ This is of course a truism that applies to every world region as it does to every nation-state.² However, the invention of Africa and of its nation-states is quite clearly condensed in one process that was as much driven from the outside as it was a matter of self-definition. The history of the European colonization of Africa and of the making of African nation-states and international organizations run remarkably parallel. Moreover, inventing Africa involved international Pan-African and anti-imperial organization on top of African-European entanglements. Each of these components has been researched reasonably well already, yet, a more thorough understanding can be reached by combining African, colonial, and international histories.

Richard Reid recently scrutinized how histories about the colonization of Africa relate to historiographies interested in Africa itself, and how both strands have different temporalities, different fields of interest, and different questions. It led him to investigate in how far African developments throughout the nineteenth century prepared the ground for the Scramble for Africa and, perhaps even more importantly, for how the scramble unfolded. He thus introduced a larger degree of continuity from precolonial times to colonization than has usually been the case in master narratives representing the scramble as a rupture imposed from the outside. For sure, this historical reappraisal does not in any way play down colonialism's extreme violence, looting, and racism, as the author explicitly underlines. Pre-existing contexts or developments that paved the way for the scramble cannot be blamed for the excesses that came with it. Yet, it does lead to a better understanding of how colonial occupation unfolded, which African contexts facilitated it, and what the role of African agency in all of this has been.³

This article attempts a similar entanglement of outside and inside perspectives, yet not bridging from the long nineteenth century to colonization, but from colonization to the twentieth century. There as well, historiographies about European imperialism in Africa have largely developed separately from those interested in Africa itself. In recent years, there have been several outstanding works crossing this bridge, but mainly focusing on anti-imperialism and decolonization,⁴ much less on understanding imperialism through the introduction of empirical material from Africa or, the other way around, on better understanding Africa through an imperial looking glass. Understandably, a genuine and

1 See V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington 1988; M. W. Lewis/K. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, Oakland, CA 1997.

2 For the invented or imagined nature of nation, see the two classics: B. Andersen, *Imagined Communities*, New York 1983; E. Hobsbawm/T. O. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge/New York 1983.

3 R. Reid, *Africa's Revolutionary Nineteenth Century and the Idea of the "Scramble"*, in: *The American Historical Review* 126 (2021) 4, pp. 1424–1447.

4 G. Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*, Chicago 2005; G. Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*, Durham 2015; H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939*, Trenton 2013; M. Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism*, Cambridge 2015; M. Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*, Oakland 2015; and P. Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*, New York 2020.

legitimate interest in an emancipated African history – or in a history of African emancipation – matches a rebuttal of imperial or colonial perspectives, considered to have been the opponent in the historical emancipation struggles itself as well as the historiographical nemesis when it comes to crafting a master narrative. I concur with much of the critique on imperial history, although I also believe that more profound insights can be gained from taking the African-imperial wrestling serious, from combining rather than mutually excluding African and imperial historiographical perspectives.

In this article, I develop an argumentation that sees 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 flag independence across Africa. With the founding of the OAU, not so much the already formally achieved decolonization of most African states was at stake but relating to an international world order and to international resistance against a reigning world order.

The article follows three steps. First, I describe an imagination from the outside that informed the imperial project of colonizing Africa. Secondly, I provide a summary analysis of the failure of this endeavor and of the two-tongued afterlife of this failure: for one, the 1920s colonial reforms meant to rescue the imperial project laid the institutional ground for territorial nation-states, and as a flip side of the coin, I explain the transition from the failure of the imperial project into an interconnected anti-imperial liberation movement. Thirdly, I argue that the OAU is not only the outcome of this decolonizing liberation movement, but also of the attempt to ensure Africa's integration in an international world order, even if this order was itself the product of a century of European-led imperial history. Territory, state, international organization, and African unity are the guiding principles running through this article.

2. Berlin's Africa: Imperial Imagination

The imagination of an African unity was in the first place a European imperial blueprint for submission. Invented from the outside as a vast continent in dire need of “civilization”, of liberation from slavery and savagery, and waiting to be economically “uplifted” or exploited, Africa and Africans were construed as objects of imperialism and of colonial conquest. Needless to say, that all over this massive land mass countless sophisticated cultural, political, and economic practices and configurations had developed over the centuries and were dynamically evolving when and also after European imperialism imposed itself. Yet, an African unity cannot be attested before this violent incursion. Even though European – as well as Arab and South-Asian for that matter – interactions with Africa go back many centuries, including Atlantic, Saharan, Mediterranean, and Indian Ocean complexes and involving slave raiding and trading agents from within as well as without Africa, an imagined unity only came into being in the second half of the nineteenth century.

It is worthwhile to investigate how this African unity has been conceived, and which long-lasting effects this has had. A decisive event in this regard was the 1884/5 Congo Conference in Berlin. Contrary to what is repeated over and over again, also by the African Union,⁵ the Berlin conference did not determine territorial borders in Africa. Parallel to the actual conference, only relatively imprecise spheres of influence were attributed to the imperial parties to the conference. However, even if the borders as such were not fixed in Berlin, the underlying idea of territoriality was indeed introduced as a continent-covering and discrete principle that was taken as a model – not only in Africa, for that matter – and would survive until today.⁶ Paradoxically, it is those cases where the borders have *not* been fixed, that are seen as a problem and cause of conflict today.

I argued elsewhere that different conceptions of territoriality existed across Africa before and parallel to colonial occupation.⁷ However, all these territorialities combined were neither uniform nor covering the entire continent. An African unity consisting of territories that, taken together, cover the entire continent, without overlaps nor empty spaces between them – albeit with several contestations – is an outcome of the European imagination and its imposition on Africa as well as on the rest of the world.

Notwithstanding, implementing this imagination did not occur overnight, nor did it go as planned. Old master narratives of colonization tend to highlight imperial rivalries as driving forces and took eventual colonial control for granted, whereas a closer look discloses almost the opposite: a shared imperial mindset amongst all colonial powers combined with an endless struggle to achieve control over territory and people. Discourses of “pacification” and “rebellion” could not conceal that colonization was in fact an utterly violent process of oppression heavily relying on temporary alliances with some strongmen and the ruthless crushing of others.

The first decades after the Scramble for Africa were characterized by a mismatch between the imagination, which continued to inform the perception of colonialism – to some extent until today –, and the realities on the ground. Despite a clearcut imperial imagination, colonialism in practice was in an inherent crisis from the onset, which is reflected in a perpetual cycle of reform and protest across the continent throughout the colonial period.

5 See AU Commission, *From Barriers to Bridges: Collection of Official Texts on African Borders from 1963 to 2012*, Addis Ababa 2013, in particular: *The Establishment of an OAU Boundaries Commission* (CM/1659 (Liv) Add. 2), Abuja, Nigeria, May to June 1991, and *International Seminar on the Implementation of the African Union Border Programme*, Djibouti, 1 to 2 December 2007, <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/au-1-en-2013-barriers-to-bridges.pdf>; and AU Commission, *Delimitation and Demarcation of Boundaries in Africa: General Issues and Case Studies*, Addis Ababa, September 2013, <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/au-2-en-2013-delim-a-demar-user-guide.pdf> (both accessed 28 February 2023).

6 For a broad assessment of the imposition of territoriality, see S. Elden, *The Birth of Territory*, Chicago 2013; C. S. Maier, *Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500*, Cambridge 2016.

7 Primarily focusing on East and Central Africa, see G. Castryck (ed.), *Special Issue. The Bounds of Berlin's Africa: Space-Making and Multiple Territorialities in East and Central Africa*, in: *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 52 (2019) 1.

3. Between Babylon and Zion: Colonial Reform and Anti-Imperial Internationalism

A crisis of empire struck Europe at the end of the First World War. Several centuries-old imperial powers collapsed, and a new world order was created on the international level. Yet, at first, this did not seem to affect the colonial claims on the African continent. Apart from dividing the war booty, in the form of former German colonies, amongst the victorious imperial warmongers, the African colonial realm seemed characterized by business as usual. Under the surface, though, colonialism was already in survival modus. The 1920s would lay the ground for how Africa and its unity would be organized after flag independence, which most African countries gained in a handful of years before and after 1960. Two interrelated dynamics matter in this regard: for one, the establishment of the colonial state, and parallel to that, the development of an international order in which anti-colonial or anti-imperial movements could thrive.

3.1 Towards a Martian State

Throughout colonized Africa the 1920s were a decade of colonial reform, attempting to entrench a relatively strong colonial state despite the failure to reach effective control over land and people. Whether under British, French or Belgian administration, bifurcated states were installed,⁸ whereby a centralized state apparatus under direct imperial control was set up, whereas the people and the land – except for colonially claimed industries or plantations – were set apart and left to self-administration under colonial surveillance. There are differences between colonial powers and between colonies, especially when it comes to how the colonial surveillance over self-rule was conceived, but by and large the establishment of a territorial centralized state went hand in hand with a bifurcation that disconnected the hard-to-control land and people from the ideal-type central state. The Portuguese colonies least fit this picture, but there as well the inability by the colonial state to govern the population, except with violent coercion, confirms the inherent contradiction of colonialism. A state apparatus with the semblance of a bureaucratic nation-state was set up but was disconnected from the people that could potentially become the nation. Frederic Cooper made sense of this colonial state as the precursor to a postcolonial gatekeeper state, whereas Nancy R. Hunt made sense of the schizophrenic character of this “nervous state”.⁹

I call this colonial state a Martian state, grasping both its structurally violent and its alien character.¹⁰ The “native administration” that constituted the Martian state’s flipside was

8 For the idea of the bifurcated state, see M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, London 1996.

9 F. Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present*, Cambridge 2002; N. R. Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo*, Durham 2016.

10 G. Castryck, *The Hidden Agenda of Citizenship: African Citizenship in the Face of the Modern Nation-State*, in: S. G. Ellis/G. Háfðanarson/A. K. Isaacs (eds.), *Citizenship in Historical Perspective*, Pisa 2006, pp. 189–202.

meant to channel tax revenues and labor recruitment on the one hand and to economize on administration on the other. Despite eloquent legitimization efforts, of which Frederick Lugard's *Dual Mandate* is perhaps the most notorious, this colonial state, delegating native administration to a parallel political structure grafted upon conveniently crafted "tribes" or ethnic groups,¹¹ was to a large extent a retreat from direct engagement with land and people – except for select areas and labor carved out for capitalistic extraction and exploitation.

A mixture of imagination and implementation, this bifurcated system never really worked. Only when an ethnic leadership pragmatically saw an own interest in playing along with the colonial "native" or "tribal" construction,¹² could it function to a certain degree – not unlike the dependence on temporary alliances in the early days of colonial conquest. The reliance on an African workforce to run the colonial economy as well as the Martian state's administration and security in combination with booming urban centers that did not match the imagined native lands-cum-people were at odds with the imagined model. Notwithstanding, the architecture of the state apparatus was fundamentally premised on this bifurcated conception and would remain so until liberation movements took over this machinery at the time of flag independence ... and in some cases much longer.

3.2 Pan-Africanism, Anti-Imperialism, and Internationalism

Obviously, there has always been a counterweight to these imperial imaginations and intrusions, which blatantly disregarded – or at best avoided or circumvented – African people, institutions, and agency. Protest or resistance against colonial conquest is as old as colonization itself. One could say that imperialists' inability to come to grips with so many unwilling or disobedient "subjects" was the trigger for the hybrid constellations explained in the previous paragraphs. There is not enough place here to present the rich and variegated histories of anti-colonial protests and movements across Africa,¹³ but I do want to pick up the strands that paved the way for African unity and for international organization.

Whereas the initial idea of one Africa may have been an imperial chimera, it is through the shared experience of colonial oppression and above all through the struggle against

11 I do not use "tribe" and ethnic group as synonyms or as a politically incorrect and a politically correct name for the same social phenomenon. Rather, I use "tribe" as the colonial tool of government that manipulated and instrumentalized – and in so doing also influenced – the social and dynamic reality of ethnic groups. Therefore, "tribe" does not refer to a socially constructed group of people, but to an institution of the bifurcated colonial state.

12 For a successful appropriation of the colonial construction for own interests, see J. MacArthur, *Cartography and the Political Imagination: Mapping Community in Colonial Kenya*, Athens, OH 2016.

13 See, for instance, T. O. Ranger, 'Connexions between "Primary Resistance" Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa', in: *Journal of African History* 9 (1968) 3, pp. 437–453; *Journal of African History* 9 (1968) 4, pp. 631–641; K. van Walraven/J. Abbink, *Rethinking Resistance in African History: An Introduction*, in: J. Abbink/K. van Walraven/M. de Bruijn (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History*, Leiden 2003, pp. 1–40.

it that an African unity became a productive force. Early resistance against colonization was, understandably, mainly organized along existing polities, structures, and connections and therefore relatively scattered. Granted, quite early on anti-colonial resisters mobilized and built alliances over large distances, as can be seen in the Maji Maji uprising against German East Africa or in the Congo Kingdom in Portuguese conquered Angola to name but a few.¹⁴ However, none of these attempts to increase the scale of resistance came close to anything resembling an organizational African unity. Despite connections across the newly drawn colonial borders, the scale of mobilization and of organization usually remained smaller than the colonial territory.

As had been the case for the idea of Africa as such, the first attempts to organize anti-colonial resistance on an all-African scale came from outside of the continent. Around the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries Pan-Africanism, initiated by African-American activists, was the first decolonizing movement to organize on the scale of African unity, a unity that included Africa's transatlantic bonds. Thus, African unity in African hands was already international at a time when nation-building in Africa had hardly begun. Or put otherwise, an anti-colonial "African nationality" predates the fifty odd African state nationalities that are in one way, or another premised on colonial demarcations.¹⁵

National liberation movements in colonial Africa primarily operated within colonial territories or at least within the confines of the respective colonial empire.¹⁶ I will return to these movements in the next subchapter. A decades-long international and transatlantic organization of African unity, however, is equally important to understand the precedents of the OAU.¹⁷

When people like W. E. B. Du Bois, and plenty of younger men and women after him, began the long struggle for African rights, they were primarily motivated by the discrimination and suffering under racist oppression in the USA, soon widening the scope to similar experiences and to a broader intellectual and organizational leadership in the

14 J. Giblin/J. Monson (eds.), *Maji Maji: Lifting the Fog of War*, Leiden 2010; J. Vos, *Kongo in the Age of Empire, 1860–1913: The Breakdown of a Moral Order*, Madison 2017. For a broader analysis of organized violence and military organization in Africa throughout the nineteenth century, see R. J. Reid, *Warfare in African History*, Cambridge 2012.

15 As late as 1963, staff of the Tanganyika African National Union, the political party that led mainland Tanzania to flag independence, listed African ("Mwafrica") as their nationality ("Taifa"). Tanzania National Archives, Kigoma Regional Office, 180.A/5, *Associations: The Tanganyika African National Union, Vol. II: 1960–1963*, TANU District Headquarters Ujiji: Names of staff ("Majina ya Watumishi").

16 But see, for instance, the political networking between British and Belgian occupied African territories in the Great Lakes region. G. Castryck, *Children of the Revolution: The Citizenship of Urban Muslims in the Burundian Decolonization Process*, in: *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14 (2020) 2, pp. 185–203; G. Castryck, *Bordering the Lake: Transcending Spatial Orders in Kigoma-Ujiji*, in: *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 52 (2019) 1, pp. 109–132; I. Milford, *African Activists in a Decolonising World: The Making of an Anticolonial Culture, 1952–1966*, Cambridge 2023.

17 A. Aubry, *Des congrès panafricains à l'Organisation de l'unité africaine: Les circulations transimpériales dans la formation des diplomates africains postcoloniaux*, in: *Revue d'histoire contemporaine de l'Afrique* 3 (2022), pp. 157–168.

Caribbean.¹⁸ Notwithstanding, an anti-racist and at the same time “race”-based community of fate with African people around the world was an intrinsic part of their thinking and organization. This is where an African-controlled African unity takes off.

The coming of age of Pan-Africanism as an international movement, including participation from the African continent, developed parallel to an internationalization of the world order in general, which becomes apparent after the First World War.¹⁹ The same transformations away from an imperial hegemony and towards an international world order that had inclined imperial powers towards bifurcated colonial reforms (see above), also show in the internationalization of Pan-Africanism – as well as of anti-imperial or decolonization movements relating to other continents.

The first Pan-African Congress (PAC) took place in Paris in 1919, parallel to the Paris Peace Conference.²⁰ Most of the delegates had an African-American, including African-Caribbean, background. Blaise Diagne participated as a delegate from Senegal, but he was at the time also a member of the French parliament and had a leading position in the French Ministry of Colonies. Two years later the second PAC took place in Brussels, Paris, and London, and had a significantly higher number of participants from the African continent.²¹ The mix of African-American leadership, enhancing the participation from Africa, and holding the meetings in the imperial metropolises illustrates how much Pan-Africanism was part of the international turn of the first afterwar years: colonial powers were addressed, even if only because of the symbolism of the locations, but within a logic that put internationalism above imperialism and that directed its demands to the League of Nations, not to the imperial powers as such.²²

Although a language barrier did complicate Pan-African unity in practice, we witness both in French and in English that anti-colonial networks, and as a corollary African unity, were crafted within the international organization of anti-imperialism and Pan-Africanism, and in particular by young leaders from the colonies in the imperial metropolises.²³

18 See S. C. Dunstan, *Race, Rights and Reform: Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States from World War I to the Cold War*, Cambridge 2021. There is also an older history of African-American liberation movements in the context of the fight against slavery, exemplified in the founding of the ambivalent colony of Liberia and in the American Civil War, but neither were based on an idea of African unity, which justifies that I will not go into these precursors to Pan-Africanism.

19 P. Susan, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, Oxford 2015; D. Laqua/W. van Acker/C. Verbruggen (eds.), *International Organizations and Global Civil Society: Histories of the Union of International Associations*, London 2019; G. Castryck, *Reinventing International Colonialism during a Crisis of Empire: Belgian-British Colonial Exchanges between Inter-Imperialism and Inter-Colonial Technical Cooperation, 1920s–1930s*, in: *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48 (2020) 5, pp. 846–865.

20 Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*; E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford 2007.

21 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Manifesto to The League of Nations*, in: *The Crisis* 23 (1921) 1, p. 18. Also see J. Fausset, *Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress*, in: *The Crisis* 23 (1921) 1, pp. 12–18.

22 Ibid.

23 See Dunstan, *Race, Rights and Reform*; Adi, *Pan-Africanism*; Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*; Matera, *Black London*; Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*.

There can be no doubt that this international movement should be understood as political, but a prominent cultural dimension should not be ignored either. Du Bois, for instance, combined literature with politics and the same is true for Léopold Senghor, the later first president of Senegal and member of parliament in France, but also a poet and co-author of a cultural ideology. When he joined and, together with mainly African-Caribbean companions, further developed the idea of “*négritude*” as a kind of Black Consciousness, it was a cultural, “race”-based, and political ideology at the same time.²⁴ These cultural underpinnings give African unity a more fundamental and transcendental character than a mere political gathering or institutional cooperation would do. At first sight more radical Pan-Africanists like Marcus Garvey, C. L. R. James, George Padmore, and later Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon – incidentally all of them having African-Caribbean backgrounds – moved on to formulate fundamental criticism on either imperialism or capitalism – or both –, thus presaging that decolonization is about much more than gaining flag independence from colonial rule. Cross-sections between anti-imperialism, communism, and anti-war movements gained political clout long before the bipolar Cold War era would again redefine the world order after the Second World War.²⁵

This is not to say that all African leaders involved in the international Pan-African or anti-imperial movement of the interwar period were communists or peace activists, but the entanglements between these different strands of counter-hegemony illustrate how much these movements should be understood on an international level, and not as the sum of national liberation movements. Countless African – as well as African-American and Asian – political leaders, many of them the first heads of state or part of the government of their respective country after flag independence, were part of the global mobility that made these international movements possible.²⁶

One moment merits particular attention. When fascists, which is just an unrestrained and mass version of imperialists, attacked the Ethiopian Empire in 1935, many of the strings mentioned so far were reshuffled. The emotional speech by the Emperor Haile Selassie before the League of Nations has been explained as the ultimate proof of the League’s failure and lack of effective power. Those proclaiming this “realist” conclusion are not completely mistaken,²⁷ but at least four other perspectives or readings are possible as well.

24 Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*; Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

25 For the League against Imperialism from 1927 onwards, see H. Weiss (ed.), *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Radical Networks, Mass Movements, and Global Politics, 1919–1939*, Leiden 2016; and for the London Conference on Peace and Empire (presided by Jawaharlal Nehru) and the Glasgow Peace and Empire Congress (keynote by George Padmore), both in 1938, see T. Williams, *Collective Security or Colonial Revolution? The 1938 Conference on Peace and Empire, Anticolonialism, and the Popular Front*, in: *Twentieth Century British History* 32 (2021) 3, pp. 325–349.

26 See Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*; Matera, *Black London*; Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*; for a slightly later view from British East Africa, see Milford, *African Activists*.

27 “Realism” here refers to a school of thought in international relations theory and is no assessment of being in line with reality.

To begin with, the Ethiopian *negusa nagast* (“King of Kings”) was considered an emperor, Ethiopia an empire. This may seem merely symbolic, but it is also temporally and spatially relevant: an age-old spiritual imperial past provided the exceptionality upon which a non-European – albeit Christian – sovereignty could be justified within a European imperial mindset. Yet, it was as a sovereign territorial state that Ethiopia could address the inter-state community of nations. Meanwhile European imperialism was also out of date or at least no longer the cornerstone of the world order, which was international rather than imperial since the aftermath of the First World War. Italian imperialists brutalizing the Ethiopian empire represented the weakness and outdatedness of imperialism as much as their aggression demonstrated strength and actuality.

Second, the violation of one of the few recognized African sovereign polities implicated the international world order as a whole. Imperialism was not something to be protected under the new world order, but state sovereignty and territorial integrity were. Even more than the mandate regime for former colonies of German and Ottoman empires, this laid bare the incompatibility of internationalism and imperialism.

Third, it is in this context of a – temporarily – collapsing international world order, which would be revived a decade later, that the merging of peace and anti-imperialism – including links to communist internationalism – became most visible.²⁸ Only a few decades before, a violent imposition of colonial order went under the guise of “pacification,” whereas now a struggle against imperialism was in and of itself conducive to peace rather than a threat to it. Not colonial reform or fighting its excesses but ending empire altogether gained the moral high ground, at least within the international networks under scrutiny.

And fourth: Rastafari! Haile Selassie is the regnal name of Ras (“Head”) Tafari Makonnen. This secular Ras Tafari, later morphed into a spiritually sanctioned emperor, became the hero of an African-Caribbean – more exactly, Jamaican – and Pan-African cultural or religious movement, that sees Ethiopia or “Zion” as the promised land, as the free land of all Africans and of the African diaspora in particular. The evil force of colonialism or of forced exile is in contrast seen as a contemporary violent and oppressive “Babylon”. The whole international and anti-imperial African unity paradigm is encapsulated in this Zion against Babylon metaphor.²⁹

African unity, African sovereignty, African liberty were elevated to a biblical, but also to a popular and to a cultural level, which strengthened the political claims and was inherently international, integrating but also going beyond the African continent.

28 See, for instance, the Conference on Peace and Empire and the Peace and Empire Congress mentioned in note 25.

29 For a complementary take on the cultural-political vision of Pan-African anti-imperialism, see A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Princeton 2019.

4. Africa in Addis: Between Colonial Legacy and International World Order

In order to understand the integration of a postcolonial Africa into an international world order and in particular the eventual founding of the OAU in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa in 1963, it is as important to look at how the colonially imagined and implemented bifurcated state could be coped with and appropriated, as it is to assess the international frame of anti-imperial African unity discussed in the previous sub-chapter. The dynamics that characterized the global, transatlantic or international African unity were not one-on-one compatible with the everyday challenges, injustices, and political mobilizations on the African continent. Several of the African political leaders were part of the international networks, most of the people were not.³⁰ That does not mean, however, that they would have been any less motivated to fight colonial oppression, but most instances of resistance were local, within the territorial context of the colony or perhaps crossing a nearby border, rather than directly connected to an international level.

The challenge to craft a national union out of a bifurcated state, in which the central level of administration had been disconnected from colonially instrumentalized “tribal” entities with an immediate impact on everyday life, was already humongous. Let alone to move from there to a transnational African unity. Fighting oneself free from colonial rule and integrating African states in an international framework, while the architecture of the colonial Martian state was deliberately geared towards internal fragmentation, was a catch 22 situation. National liberation movements in late-colonial Africa were mainly dealing with the colonial-made challenges within their respective territories. Even if the leadership kept the international lines open, this was seldomly turned into a priority within national liberation campaigns. Moreover, the international world order also modified in a bipolar Cold War context, which in some circles discredited the communist-leaning fractions of the international Pan-Africanist movement. Against this background, torn apart between national challenges and international polarization, it may seem a rather remarkable achievement that an Organization of African Unity could be formed in May 1963.

This is probably the place where the reader expects to read about the different views on international cooperation, strong or loose ties between African states, positioning within a Cold War world order, the relation to African diasporas, and the priority of domestic problems as reflected in the conflict between the Casablanca and Monrovia groups which preceded the founding of the OAU. However, this is a story that has been told in a convincing manner by others,³¹ and I have little, if anything, to add. Instead, I want to trace fundamental challenges faced by the newly independent African states and their coveted

30 For the international networking of decolonization activists, see Wilder, *Freedom Time*; Milford, *African Activists*; A. Russell, *Punctuated Places: Narrating Space in Burundi*, in: *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 52 (2019) 1, pp. 133–158.

31 M. Bedjaoui, *From the Pan-Africanist Movement to the African Union: Brief Historical Overview of Steps to African Unity*, in: A. A. Yusuf/F. Ouguergouz (eds.), *The African Union: Legal and Institutional Framework. A Manual on the Pan-African Organization*, Leiden 2012, pp. 7–23; A. S. Basiru/M. L. A. Salawu/A. Adepoju, *Radical Pan-Af-*

international cooperation, by picking up the four elements touched upon so far: territory, the Martian state, international organization, and African unity. I thus combine strands from the history of colonialism, international history, and African history, which taken together lead to a more refined understanding of the tensed relation between the legacies of colonialism and of international Pan-Africanism on the one hand and the challenges of decolonization on the African continent on the other hand.

Perhaps remarkably, the idea of territoriality was not questioned as such, even though the specific way in which politics was grafted upon bounded political space, which is the essence of territoriality, had clearly been a colonial imposition, and even though other ways of conceiving of power, space, and bounding had worked well in parts of Africa before colonization.³² What was a contentious issue, though, was where exactly the bounds should be and whether or not certain territories should be merged.³³ It is well known that the African states in the OAU resolutely decided not to open this box of pandora and to leave colonial boundaries untouched. Nonetheless, those borders that were already contested between colonial powers remained bones of contention afterwards – and more often than not for the same reasons. The criticism that colonialism had imposed arbitrary boundaries disregarding social realities or cutting population groups in half, is reiterated until today, although the historical record is more nuanced on this point (see above). However, the critique on arbitrary boundaries makes clear that the underlying territoriality, i.e., the idea that discrete and unequivocal boundaries are both needed and possible, is taken for granted.

The state was understood to be a challenge. Its bifurcated nature served a colonial agenda, either of divide and rule or of evading inherent contradictions of colonialism by disconnecting the state from the population. The Martian state was violent in its intrusion and alien in the separation it imposed. There is a serious risk of inheriting these inherent contradictions when flag independence would mean that the Martian state be institutionally perpetuated. The question how to deal with the balance between ethnicity and nationality, which is basically a reflection of the bifurcated state, was at the heart of political strife in many African countries and between anti-colonial liberation movements and leaders. It largely depended on local circumstances if an ethnic group was large enough or its leader powerful enough to impose itself on an entire nation, or if political leaders managed to build a national unity overarching and incorporating ethnic diversity, or if ethnicist and nationalist stances confronted each other – violently or not. Additional interventions and manipulations by (former) colonial powers complicated and at times escalated these conflictual options even further. The decision to form the OAU, in line with an international world order that saw state sovereignty and territorial

ricanism and Africa's Integration: A Retrospective Exploration and Prospective Prognosis, in: *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 41 (2018) 1, pp. 103–124.

32 On territoriality, see Maier, *Once Within Borders*; on multiple territorialities, see Castryck, *The Bounds of Berlin's Africa*.

33 See, for instance, F. Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960*, Princeton 2014.

integrity as a founding principle, helped to cement the primacy of the state, no matter how each state dealt with its tensions within.

That brings this historical analysis to the question of international organization. One level of interpretation tying the elements introduced in this article together could be to ask how anti-colonial liberation movements across Africa related and contributed to international Pan-African networks, who acted internationally and who did not, and in how far Pan-African or anti-imperial international organization strengthened decolonization movements in Africa. A top-down approach to this question could be to assess in how far a world order internationally characterized by the United Nations system and Cold War polarization determined how new states could or could not position themselves. The question can also be taken to a more regional level of immediate border-crossing international exchanges and cooperation – in fact reflecting tensions between inter-imperial and intra-African inter-colonial cooperation in the 1920s.³⁴ These different levels of addressing international organization illustrate that the question of international organization is not only about the relation between national and international or between state, sub-state, and inter-state, as touched upon in the previous paragraph, but also about spatial scale and degrees of hegemony or subalternity. Bob Marley is no less international than Haile Selassie, a Congolese war refugee in Tanzania no less than a climate summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, a Pentecostal church no less than the African Union.

There is a genuine tension between the continental inter-state institutional structure of the OAU and the trans-Atlantic, African-American-initiated, and Paris- or London-occupying origin of an internationally organized African unity. Also, the cultural and popular underpinnings of African unity, which have spread from and to the African continent in the form of music or religion amongst others, are not at par with the diplomatic inter-state understanding of unity and union that has been institutionalized and lived in Addis Ababa, the headquarter of the African Union, but also the capital of a territorial state, and home to Ras Tafari. This raises the question which place the political and cultural, Pan-African and anti-imperial, trans-Atlantic, communist, and international pioneers of African unity have taken, still take or perhaps will take in the history, present, and future of African decolonization, in African self-understanding and representation, in Africans' own imagination of African unity.

34 Castryck, *Reinventing International Colonialism*.