Pan-Africanism: Geopolitics, Political Realism and State Governance[1]

Maurício Waldman[2]

Abstract:

Pan-Africanism is a set of ideas with a central focus on the notion of cultural and historical unity across the continent, serving as a paradigm for the political unity of Africans. Being a paramount concept in the political evolution of the continent, Pan-Africanism encompasses the anti-colonialist struggles, the decolonization era, and the current global situation. This text adopts an argumentative approach, questioning whether the African political scenario has put the seductive notion of the continent's political unity to its toughest tests. African unity has faced both exogenous obstacles (particularly the interference of external powers) and endogenous determinants, rooted in Africa's pre-colonial times. Essentially, this paper highlights the gap between the maximalist tendency led by Kwame Nkrumah, which underlines the "kingdom of the political", in contrast to the minimalist trend that emphasizes the "politics of kingdoms", pivotal to understanding the OAU history. Furthermore, the paper assesses the African states' performance in terms of what political realism has imposed, like the nation-state concept and the borders' inviolability, increased social vulnerability, global strategic alignments, inter-ethnic conflicts, political fragmentation, irredentism, lack of political will, the action of terrorist organizations, and Islamic supremacism, issues that call into question the foundations of the pan-Africanist ideal.

Keywords:
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[1] DOI:

[2] Senior Researcher, Africa Research Institute, Doctoral School for Safety and Security Sciences, Óbuda University, Budapest, Hungary; ORCID: 0000-0002-7210-1535; mw@mw.pro.br.

Introduction

The topic of Pan-Africanism and its intricate connection with independent African countries' interstate interactions is not just challenging but also absolutely significant in the field of international relations in the post-decolonization era. This discussion presents a complex web of historical, political, cultural, geographical, and sociological factors that demand a comprehensive reflection on particular realities.

Therefore, the statehood and governance in the pan-Africanist ideas scenario go beyond the framework of an isolated theme to become a paramount aspect of understanding the continent's political expectations. The issue provides clues for understanding the internal tendencies of Pan-Africanism, the tensions between unity and political diversity, and the discrepancies that oppose African national statehood to continental solidarity.

Considering these problematics, an attentive and objective analysis of the state's role is undoubtedly necessary for contemporary African studies. It becomes a vital source to question common-sense narratives and to encourage a differentiated vision of Pan-Africanism performance, highlighting the logicality of engagement of this in terms of its concrete reach.

Thus, biased conceptions, often consecrated by exhaustive repetition, normalizing political notions that incorporate unrealistic propositions, must be reassessed and revised. For instance, the concept of one African super-state integrating all postcolonial African nations, on the one hand, or the idea that African countries are inherently supportive, on the other hand, certainly demands a revaluation. Therefore, upholding rigorous academic analysis standards is crucial, with the methodological exemption playing a critical role in approaching these conceptualizations.

This text prioritizes a discussion of international relations, exploring the interactions among countries and the dynamics that shape continental African politics. However, in several moments, we go beyond this approach, embodying distinctive information supported by the social sciences field and, particularly, the premises of geographical expertise.

The importance of geographical scontribution is first and foremost made explicit by the geographical nature of states and all power architectures, which structure spatial materiality to support political authorities' actions at all levels and scales in the ineluctable relations maintained with geographic space (MELLO, 1999; RATZEL, 1969 and 1914; MAULL, 1959).

Furthermore, the focus on geopolitics and political geography is the geographical nature of the state and the doctrine of a matrix relationship between the facts of geography and the universe of politics. This proposition includes the indispensable link between space and the exercise of power, which is a determinant for understanding territorial management and the spatial dynamics of the state (CLAVAL, 1979).

Space also refers to the capacity of objects, forms, and human actions incorporated into geographic space to revive, induce, and maintain processes and dynamics that

structure (and restructure) the inhabited space. Socio-spatial formations are constructional, an unequally accumulated time, brothering spatial objects and human actions, and as a historical construction, they constantly aggregate new meanings and functions (SANTOS, 1998, 1988, 1978).

The variables under consideration are of paramount importance in the forthcoming analysis. This study is centered on the context of decolonization that spanned nearly all of Africa. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new state structures, which were tasked with establishing and fortifying national identities that were hitherto unprecedented. These entities also found themselves in a complex interaction with fundamental tenets of Pan-Africanism, particularly the aspiration to forge a political unity encompassing the entire African continent (WALDMAN, 2013).

Immediately, the unique characteristics that have existed in the diverse African spatial frameworks since time immemorial would present a significant challenge to the unitary ideal that was established in the early days of the pan-African movement. This potential clash, coupled with a myriad of geopolitical disruptions, has played a pivotal role in shaping the turbulent landscape that is now a defining feature of many parts of Africa.

Kingdom of the Politics Versus Politics of the Kingdoms

The discussion of Pan-Africanism as an objective political fact is essentially centered on the movement for African decolonization. In 1960, 17 new sovereign states became part of the continent's political geography, considered the *Year of Africa* due to the flurry of auto-determination, a process that extended throughout the next decades until the 1990s.

Although it has achieved its primary goal, eliminating direct colonial command on the continent, it would be appropriate to emphasize that the independence movement faced several contradictions in the same way as in other contexts of the former colonial empires.

Therefore, the decolonization process in Africa was not a uniform or a linear journey. Instead, it was a complex and diverse series of events, each reality experiencing unique challenges. On the continent, "there were setbacks, comings and goings, sudden rebirths of empires that no longer existed, and the patterns of liberation varied greatly between the different empires" (LOHBAUER, 2008: 117).

In short, by unevenly representing unique moments in the continent's history, decolonization took on multiple meanings, prescribing choices and imperatives that were not always in harmony. The abolition of direct domination, the cornerstone of decolonization, changed the political contract of the emerging nation-states. Administration, now exercised by new political actors, obviously Indigenous, marked a significant shift in power dynamics.

However, as such, this metamorphosis of power did not necessarily strengthen the administrative machine or benefit the local population. Not surprisingly, independence did not mean any real gain for many social groups because of the state apparatus's limited operational capacity. Moreover, the newly emancipated African countries

became easy prey to the confrontations that characterized international relations in the post-independence period.

From a backdrop of disputes, border litigation, regional disagreements over resource and tax allocation, and disruptions of all kinds, like civil wars and coups, ended up being recomposed in the heat of radical rivalries, while projects of regional and continental domination developing behind the scenes (Apud LOHBAUER, 2008: 128-129 and 135).

Coherently, the iconic year of 1960 also revealed conflicts that became the premonitory stage for sharp clashes dividing the continent throughout the coming decades. In the former Belgian Congo, severe political upheavals sparked the Congo Crisis (1960-1965), a pivotal event that stigmatized the African *annus mirabilis* of 1960. The conflict triggered the *first civil war in independent Africa*, *the first deployment of European soldiers to a continent on the brink of independence*, and *the first coup d'état to overthrow an elected head of state in what public perception perceived as a newly liberated Africa*.

This turbulent sequence of events, followed by many others in different parts of Africa, was one of the first signs that national self-determination would not solve colonialism's dilemmas and that Africa's journey towards national self-determination might be much more embroiled than it first imagined.

Therefore, we must accept the verdict that the international panorama is a complex plot that meets elements that interfere with pan-Africanist ideals are present. In this spectrum, Africa constituted fertile ground for neocolonialism, a form of indirect control and economic exploitation by former colonial powers or other powerful nations that plunged the continent into harsh trials.

In particular, the nature of Western investments and technologies, accompanied by economic growth models developed outside the continent, consistently satisfying foreign interests, played a crucial role. Above all, such premises led to the formalization of the African nations as dependent economies, exporters of raw ore, timber, agricultural and livestock commodities to the affluent countries of the Western Hemisphere, which obtained the bulk of the profits through so-called economically unequal exchanges (ASANTE et CHANAIWA, 2010: 884; LOHBAUER, 2008: 128).

Thus, the economic sphere, also because it constitutes the driving force of modern society, could hardly fail to impact the African scenario. This statement is even more so when we know that Africa is a source of raw materials and primary products that are indispensable for keeping the economies of central countries functioning and, by extension, maintaining the global economic system.

Next, concerning the nature of Africa's relationship with foreign governments and the kind of progress offered to multilateral relations on a continental level, the economic interface is essential for elucidating incompleteness of Pan-Africanism and on the threshold of this assumption, the inevitable repercussions regarding existing forms of integration (NDOMO, 2009).

In the thematic line followed by this text, we must again consider the inseparability of the pan-African ideal from the movements committed in the 19th century to

recovering the dignity and promoting the emancipation of the black diaspora1. Resolutely, overseas Afro-communities and the African continent form two poles in a symbiosis that ratifies Pan-Africanism as an umbrella concept.

This pan-African unity is rooted in a notion of community of origin that proposes a Gemeinschaft (community), re-schematized, united, and supportive, destined to set the tone for a common destiny. We must stress that Pan-Africanism was a doctrine established in the early XX Century as a political and cultural movement. Therefore, the pan-African ideal proposes Africa and the Black Diaspora as two trunks of the same tree (ASANTE et CHANAIWA, 2010: 884).

However, we must remember that the classic definitions of *Gemeinschaft* do not exclude concrete interaction with the *Gesellschaft* concept, that is, social relations based on impersonal ties related to society or non-communitarian organizations. Indeed, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* include elements of each other, are not watertight, and, on the contrary, cohabitate in social materiality.

Therefore, although pan-African original ideas highlight a political and cultural path, this assertion does not necessarily omit a relation to the world of economics. Thus, in what could be a big dilemma interposed to the post-independence African theater, even the most superficial of assessments outlines the blatant omission of the economic as a programmatic reference.

Moreover, the role of politics was a dominant theme in the pan-African imaginary, and the economic commandments were merely ancillary to the political and cultural guidelines central to pan-Africanist literature. The debates in the mid-1960s, which saw an eminent political platform dismissing the economy as a priority concern, were a clear manifestation of this. Consequently, the question of the economy will become a divisive theme, permeating in differentiated modes in the two currents of leadership in the African continental politics theater, thereby influencing their direction and focus.

Leftist, radical, or maximalist, and the right-wing, moderate, or minimalist factions opposed each other, differing based on different interpretations of the importance and meaning of African unity. This debate became prominent in the late 1950s. At that time, invested with the enormous prestige that came to him as the first independent head of state in Black Africa, Kwame Nkrumah, leader of Ghana independent, or the *Osagyefo*2, emerged as a continental reference, his ideas carrying significant weight in the discourse on African unity.

The Ghanaian leader's paradigmatic thinking is expressed in a famous slogan that would soon become the hallmark of his programmatic agenda: "*Seek first the political kingdom, and all else will follow.*" Nkrumah explicitly privileged the political domain as a vehicle for African unity. With political sovereignty, Africans would make possible the desired transformations and the emergence of new social and economic contracts, such as equitable land distribution and fair labor practices, understood as epiphenomenal manifestations of the latest status of political emancipation.

Working to put this precept into practice, Nkrumah embarked on bold integration projects encapsulated in the motto: Africa must unite. This iconic pan-African call is a

testament to Nkrumah's vision and determination. The Ghanaian leader championed the idea of a United States of Africa (incidentally, a concept first launched by the Afro-Jamaican leader Marcus Garvey) and fervently emblazoned it in his speeches. Nkrumah, an advocate of unconditional African unity, played a pivotal initiative in the formation of the union between Ghana and Guinea-Conakry (1958), a proposal that later expanded with the establishment of the Union of African States (Federation of Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, and Mali), in force from 1961 to 1963.

These experiences were conceived as steps towards a supranational government, erasing the borders of the newly independent African countries. At the same time, Nkrumah supported the organization of the Conference of Independent States (held in Accra in April 1958) no more than a year after the country's independence.

This initial impulse gave rise to the All-African People's Conference (Accra, 1958), the Guinea-Liberia Summit (Sanniquelli, July 1959), the Second Conference of Independent African States (Monrovia, August 1959), and the Addis Ababa Conference (June 1960). These decisive summits, in which Nkrumah played a key role, contributed to the foundation for the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963, instilling hope and optimism for the future of Africa.

All these conferences, beyond the political integration or political unity of Africa in terms of economic integration, strongly recommended the creation of a pan-African common market covering the whole continent. Reinforcing this motion, in 1958 was created the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA or ECA-UN), a significant international initiative that promoted African integration. The state of the art was certainly conducive to defending the slogans put forward by those seeking integration, particularly the endorsement of a comprehensive continental geo-economic standpoint:

“Calling for the elimination of customs barriers and other obstacles to trade between African States, as well as for the conclusion of multilateral payment agreements with a view to developing economic exchanges and striving for the creation of a common market” (ASANTE et CHANAIWA, 2010: 875).

However, preaching the precedence of the “political kingdom,” a paradigm of Nkrumah’s ardent pan-African rhetoric, had little concrete impact on the realization of continental integration. In this exact sense, the preponderance given by Kwame Nkrumah to the political sphere proved to be erroneous, ending up being the target of the more complex and implacable reality checks (MAZRUI, 2010: 125; FAGE et TORDOFF, 2010: 516-549). In the words of his critics, the slogan coined by Osagyefo *obscured a seminal distinction taught by good philosophy: that between a necessary condition and a sufficient condition* (MAZRUI, 2010).

Undoubtedly, political sovereignty is a necessary condition for satisfying the essential aspirations of colonized peoples. At the level of colonial oppression, there is no way to object to the priority of the “conquest of the political realm.” The African tour de force in obtaining political sovereignty was justified as a necessary and appropriate reaction. Like all populations assailed by colonialist domination, the peoples of Africa reacted to

the challenges posed by Western lords with what seemed to them to be the most appropriate and adaptive response.

Thus, even though the modern world is based on economic objectivity, the 'kingdom of economics' was not reflected in the ideas governing Africans' political self-projection and the inflections that marked the pan-Africanist movement. The immediate need to obtain political citizenship was pressing, making the kingdom of politics gain enormous prestige as a 'strong currency' in the pan-African political programs.

This was particularly true for the first-generation African leaders who were sympathetic to the Nkrumah ideas, such as Ahmed Sékou Touré (Guinea-Conakry) and Modibo Keïta (Mali), whose influence were significant. Besides, the overlapping of the project of a continental common market with the movement for political unification aroused fears in the conservative African head-state field, materializing opposition to the maximalist proposal, a resistance tempered by a substantial collection of untimeliness.

In this scenario, consider Mali (former French Sudan) and Senegal embarked on a pioneering experiment in interstate integration. In a brief but crucial period, from January 1959 to August 1960, both nations formed the Mali Federation, an experience that happened even before Kwame Nkrumah's initiatives. This bold step foreshadowed the potential obstacles faced by future interstate integration models across the continent (MAYALL, 1975: 2601).

At this moment, the French Upper Volta (Today Burkina Faso) and Dahomey (later the Republic of Benin) also manifested desires to participate in the Mali Federation. Interestingly, it is worth noting that due to political pressures from France and the Ivory Coast, which opposed the Federation (although for different reasons), the Upper Volta and Dahomey withdrew their candidatures before the official inauguration of the union (As we may perceive, even in the initial moments of Pan-Africanism, the former western powers remain influent).

Mali and Senegal were ruled by powerful and charismatic figures, Mobido Keïta and Léopold Sedar Senghor. With their opposing political tendencies (progressive and conservative), these leaders demonstrated no inclination to share or give up their power. Their governments' political philosophies, one radical and the other gradualist, were not conducive to a harmonious union. They were also not immune to the contradictions that had long existed in the region's history, both before and during colonization, including the African political-geographical circumstantial momentum already marked by intense polarization.

Then, the nascent union failed, and following the sudden and hostile separation from Senegal (little affected by the unfortunate experience), Mali forcibly reassessed its geopolitical strategy. The closure of the border with Senegal and the loss of access to the port of Dakar prompted Mali to seek new alliances. Mobido Keïta moved closer to the Ivory Coast, a decision technically prompted by the Mali geographical imperative as a landlocked country (such as the previous union with Senegal), and actively sought participation in the Union of African States, a regional organization formed by Guinea-

Conakry, Mali, and Ghana, with a more significant legacy than the Mali Federation, yet brief and likewise unsuccessful (1958-1963).

From a broader perspective, the obstacles to African integration arose from the fragility of most new sovereign states, whose attention was monopolized by internal dysfunctions. Several tasks inherent to governance itself taunted the new countries in a spectrum that included the consolidation of new national identities, the strengthening of the parties that emerged as holders of independent state powers, political instability, and the daily possibility of *coup d'états* hatched in the barracks; issues related to security, critical during the Cold War years; demands imposed by poverty and intrusions of the former colonial powers.

En résumé, considering the omnipresent priorities, tensions, and scuffles in the newly independent countries, engaging in a pan-African policy beyond the borders of the new States or simply implementing pan-Africanist resolutions in national spaces presented unquestionable difficulties. In this way, African integration faced barriers within the political forces that came to hold control of the State apparatus. Much more than being concerned with diluting power within a continental political framework, the new elites were more concerned with strengthening and consolidating the governance of the dominant group within the specific power space of the recently independent countries than actually engaging in the continental endeavor (WALDMAN, 2020a; NTALAJA, 2012; BADI, 2002 and 2001).

As for the external political sphere, another element inhibiting integration was the sharp independence struggle. This struggle, which was particularly intense in several parts of Africa, required intensifying the confrontation with colonialism and support for national liberation movements, a priority objective of the moment. Added to this was the inertial component of the State as a legal-institutional entity. Repeating a recurring trend in integration processes, the African State resisted giving up its authority, guiding objections to the demands of the continental association. Observer the following quote:

"Nowhere in Africa was there a willingness to sacrifice national interests on the altar of integration. African States did not agree to liberalize trade or share industries unless there was a conflict between regional integration objectives and national imperatives, whether it was security, prestige, or economic advantages" (ASANTE et CHANAIWA, 2010: 881).

Another complicating factor for the integration agenda was entangled in the dictates of an "African version" of the Cold War, polarizing two emerging rival blocs - Casablanca and Monrovia - that diverged on a wide range of purposes, adding further layers of disagreements to the situation. The agenda of tensions included relations established with great powers, the diplomatic plan in general, and economic models. In this regard, ideological guidelines regarding the directives of African integration rapidly and nervously gave rise to explicit sticking points (DÖPCKE, 1999: 90-91; MAYALL, 1975).

Hence, Ghana, Libya, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria formed the Casablanca group with a maximalist orientation and progressive stance. At this time,

Algeria, still subjugated by French colonial rule, was represented by the Provisional Government of the Republic of Algeria (PGRA), openly left-wing, while Morocco was a conservative kingdom.

Nonetheless, Morocco played a crucial role in supporting the Algerian insurgence against France, providing arms and money to the National Liberation Front (NLF). More significantly, Morocco served as a strategic rear base for the NLF, allowing it to set up training camps and logistic sanctuaries.

Programmatically, the Casablanca bloc subscribed to African unity as a continental unitary project inspired by the United States of Africa, a proposal tirelessly invoked by Nkrumah's fervent rhetoric. The group's political action lines had extensive repercussions, both in public opinion on the continent and abroad, endorsed by engaged media worldwide, by the Soviet Union, and the former Eastern European countries.

In turn, the Monrovia coalition, inspired by conservative and minimalist ideology, was aligned with the pro-Western positions, particularly of the United States and France. This bloc resulted from the alliance of the Union Africaine et Malgache (former French-speaking colonies whose indigenous elites aligned with France) with other moderate states such as Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

While advocating the pan-African ideal, the Monrovia Bloc did not do so at the expense of the sovereignty of young African nation-states. Their stance, in direct opposition to the Casablanca group, promoted cooperation between African states, *focusing on cultural and economic ties rather than state issues*3. This proposition is evident from the bloc's original provisions, which heralded without mincing words: "The unity we must achieve at this time is not the political integration of sovereign African states, but the unity of aspirations and action from the point of view of solidarity and African identity" (M'BOKOLO, 2012: 633).

However, beyond the fundamental programmatic disagreements, there were profound differences of opinion about the nature and how to guide the international relations of the new African states with the former colonial powers. These differences led to inescapable unconformities in the internal plane of continental politics, underscoring egregious splits. We must take the case of the two main international issues of the period: the fight for Algeria's independence and the Congo Crisis.

For example, the Algerian question case presented contradictions for the Monrovia Group due to previously bloc-established agreements with France. As partners in the freedom of Africa, the countries of the Monrovia Group supported the political agenda of the PGRA. However, they hesitated to endorse any intervention by the United Nations in the Algerian Crisis. In the case of the Congo Crisis, the Monrovia Block proposed a round table discussion that would bring together rival Congolese factions. In doing so, the group demonstrated a conciliatory attitude towards the pro-Western breakaway militias in Katanga, who were under Moïse Tshombe's command with the ostentatious support of the Belgian mining companies.

At the same time, while the Monrovia bloc states expressed support for the Mauritanian independence, the Casablanca group (along with PGRA leaders) positioned itself in favor of the controversial Moroccan claim for Mauritania4. This decision was not a programmatic stance but rather a geopolitical maneuver. It is essential to acknowledge that the inclusion of Morocco, a country widely conservative within the Casablanca radical group, involved a strategic exchange of political support: "In exchange for tacit support for Moroccan irredentism by the group, this state sided with the most radical countries in the Congo Crisis" (DÖPKE, 1999: 90).

From 1957 to 1963, a time-lapse marked by Ghana's independence and the creation of the OAU, frictions emerged that challenged the dominant discourse on African unity, tensions with a blatant impact on Continental politics. The atmosphere of the Cold War, with its polarizing effects, not only heightened the potential for these measures to disrupt governance frameworks but also exacerbated the effect of inter-state disagreements. Coupled with global polarization, the clashes between maximalism and minimalism also legitimized proposals for conditional African integration, *which proposed African unity as a fact a posteriori rather than a priori* (BADI, 2001: 63-64).

In this scenario, marked by serious threats to the pan-African ideal, the only viable solution, far removed from maximalist propositions, would be to recognize and emphasize the sovereignty of the states that have emerged from the recompositing of the political structures created by colonialism. This new horizon of expectations was undoubtedly a direct result of the growing isolation of maximalist theses and the resolute rejection of the postulate that the new African states should sacrifice their sovereignty on the altar of African integration.

After several clashes between the two main pan-African tendencies, a contextualized desire for integration, reflecting aspirations that were substantially different from the original proposals, began to set the tone for continental dynamics, guaranteeing what now seemed to be of paramount importance: *the political sovereignty of African states*, a concept that supported the consolidation of distinctive state apparatuses, by the famous international jurisprudence principle of *uti possidetis juris*, according to which countries that effectively occupy a given territory have the right to it.

This new organizing axis of Pan-Africanism, adopted as a permanent clause by the Organization of African Unity, *subscribed to the imperative idea that anything is better than changing borders* (DUROSELLE, 2000: 78-79). As a result, a conservative consensus that supported this logic opposed any changes to the demarcation lines. After all, borders were a defining marker of political space for the new African governing elites. In turn, the norms of international relations supported conservatism on the issue of borders, which recognized the new states as actors in African political cartography and legitimate actors in the global arena.

The revision of the original pan-African repertoire altered the concrete as well as the symbolic level of continental politics, marking profound mutations in the focus and animation of the Pan-African ideal, which was increasingly divorced from the condition of a seductive Black and African *Weltanschauung*. It becomes the object of resignification

into a project (or mere program of action) of states endowed with a rarefied normative capacity, supported by an institutional *modus faciendi* pervade by economic demands averse to radical political adventures.

The rapid mobilization of Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, and Modibo Keïta to stem the bleeding of African integration, with the decisive support of Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, culminated in a summit of independent African states in Addis Ababa in 1963. This summit's main objective was to end the discord that had erupted on the continent. However, this organizational moment, while underlining the historical primacy of the unity of the continent, could not hide the incompleteness of the initial pan-African proposals.

The fact that the historic meeting for creating the OAU took place in Addis Ababa does not allow for the dilution of spatial symbolic logic in formal and anodyne historicism. Although the Ethiopian capital has the inescapable prestige of embodying Africa's anti-imperialist resistance, the city also hosts the Abyssinian monarchy, one of the oldest in the world, leading an old traditional empire in an ocean of young new republics recently founded. We may not forget that the OAU summit took place far from Accra, the capital of Ghana, which, at the dawn of continental self-determination, positioned itself as an emblematic beacon of the pan-African dream.

Accordingly, the rigorous republican pan-African primacy now relied on the support of the ancient Abyssinian State, led by a monarchy with a long and biblical Solomonic lineage. In this line of topological revision of the pan-African agenda, it is clear that the formula of the "*United* States of Africa" was recomposed into a "*Union* of African States," a new approach that implied an explicit acceptance of the factual irrevocability that political sovereignty alone was not enough.

Thereby, by a *diktat* based on a premeditated lameness, *in extremis* founded on an agenda *aimed at unifying, but not uniting*, Pan-Africanism seemed to plunge into an ersatz impulse, biasedly confirming the preaching of the Roman philosopher Seneca, who sentenced *Non est ad astra mollis e terris via*: The path from Earth to the stars is not easy (Furious Hercules, v. 437).

We know the power of words. They bring us closer to knowledge, project us into the world of ideas, and give color to reality. They animate and stimulate the will of peoples, groups, and civilizations. On this path of understanding, Pan-Africanism, as a comprehensive and affirmative identity concept, raises the inquiry of how this continental project, outlining a continental *Gemeinschaft* and foreshadowing a new and seminal political horizon, remains incomplete and unrealized.

The evaluation of the practical program of Pan-Africanism and the tremendous difficulties that pervade it today is, therefore, necessary, even if it remains an open page, because of what it is possible to list in the flow of a history in which we are attentive beholders.

A Unity Founded on What?

This text, which critically examines the pan-African trajectory from the perspective of effectiveness, security, good governance, and institutional stability, brings to the forefront the big dilemma of the pan-African political playbook: *the challenge of establishing a genuine unity for the continent*.

This impasse has implications for redefining and reconnecting the black world, encompassing Africa and the multi-diversified Afro-descendant diaspora. It underscores the need for veritable unification, a fundamental aspect related to the recurrent call to achieve unity among the people and countries of the African world (MBENGE, 2013).

Although the idea of continental unity was, from the beginning of the pan-Africanist trajectory, the mobilizing touchstone of the different national liberation movements, the evident recurrences of particularities intertwined with the internal realities of the new states, the old ethnic and regional identities of the continent, the expansionist volition that erupted in various parts of Africa, and in parallel, the destabilizing action of the global powers, per se or intertwined with political diversions in force in the African space, imposed the revision of the original pan-Africanist protocols.

It was in this way that the emergence of the OAU, which by definition embodied a proposal that met the concern of resolving excruciating conflicts that threatened to spiral out of control, adopted the inviolability of borders inherited from extinct colonial empires as an enthroned principle of continental status, which over the decades following the *magister annus* of 1963, in addition to ensuring a certain level of juridic civility, would also be the basis for the constitution of Regional Economic Communities (REC), that in minimalist discourses were canonized as a fundamental pillar of the continental integration (WALDMAN, 2020b, NDOMO, 2009; FERNANDES, 2009; CARVALHO, 2007).

Thereafter, despite numerous borders drawn by rulers and compasses, these lines have bestowed legitimacy and stability on the young African republics. Their remarkable resilience in the face of intense centrifugal tendencies such as separatism, ethnic conflicts, irredentism, and demarcation disputes, as well as their acceptance of this principle, is a testament to their strength.

It is important to note that, despite the typical portrayal of Africa as a mosaic of states comprising hostile tribes, no tribal state emerged on the political map of the continent. Disputes with ethnic components only exceptionally contested the recognized borders. The political map of Africa, home to a large majority of multi-ethnic countries, remains virtually unchanged from what it was decades ago, in stark contrast, for instance, to the European political geography that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet system.

However, the disturbing point is that the current geopolitical scenario in Africa raises serious concerns for any observer, even in the most superficial analyses, regarding the brutality of the forces that fracture the continent.

In this way, pan-African unity was undermined by a potpourri of motivations, among them the attachment to authoritarian models, the patronage-based vocation of political leaders, the economic underperform (in many cases magnetized by a neo-colonialist

raubwirtshaft model), intense ethno-regional radicalization, weak state legitimacy, and predilection of the governing elite to vertical relations over horizontal ones, including those that always typified traditional communities throughout the continent (WALDMAN, 2013).

From an eminently geospatial perspective, the tendency to disaggregate the African state structure is evident in a wide range of spatial contradictions and fragmenting entropies. These issues indicate that the political map of the continent, supported by the political institutional imaginary proposed by the nation-state concept, is under severe scrutiny.

The lines that divide Africa conceal contentious issues and insurgent dynamics that constantly reshuffle and modify borders and realities, creating a convulsed and ever-changing landscape. Is appropriate to argue that a new turbulent and disruptive cartography has undermined the very core of state governance on the continent, as we intend to affirm from the following scores:

1. Contemporary Africa has been repeatedly affected by terrorist movements5, carried out by fundamentalist Islamist activists primarily organized as non-state actors. Experts describe them based on umbrella concepts like Islamist terrorism, radical Islamic terrorism, radical Islamic fundamentalism, or Jihadism.

Terrorist actions have become a widespread concern in the whole continent. According to the Global Terrorism Index, in 2023, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for almost 59 percent of all international fatalities linked to terrorist attacks. Eight of the fifteen countries listed in the ranking of those most affected by terrorist actions are African continent nations: Burkina Faso, Mali, Somalia, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mozambique (GTI, 2024).

Militant groups like Al-Shabaab in African Horn (allegiant to the Islamist organization al-Qaeda), Boko Haram (self-identified with ISIS), active in Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Chad, and Cameroon, and the Insurgency of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique (also claiming links with ISIS), cause drastic disturbs in the national and continental order. The scale of this phenomenon has changed the epicenter of global terrorism, which has shifted from the Middle East to the Sahel Region6. Terrorist activities have increased significantly,

> "*…with deaths rising nearly tenfold since 2019. In 2024, the Sahel accounted for 51 percent of all terrorism deaths, while overall conflict deaths in the region exceeded 25,000 for the first time since the inception of the Index. Of these, 3,885 were attributed to terrorism. Terrorism deaths here are now ten times higher than in 2019. The Sahel remains the global epicenter of terrorism, accounting for over half of all terrorism-related deaths in 2024 with the number of countries affected increasing. Five of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism are in this region…*" (GTI, 2025: 4).

This process sparked overwhelming civil wars, devastating the regional economies, undermining civil society, promoting *coups d'états*, paving the way to organized crime

expansion, prompting more violence, deepening instability, and jeopardizing the state governance in Sahelian countries. For instance, the Burkina Faso central government had only controlled about 60 percent of its territory as of 2022, with further losses in the year since, with the jihadist groups filling the political vacuum (GTI, 2024: 15).

In the past, Sub-Saharan Africa experienced continuous *razzias* of the Middle Eastern slave traders, a tragedy only less severe than the aggressive Western slave trade that began in the 16th century. Today, the action of Islamic extremism is a source of disarray and instability that certainly may provoke or induce even stronger cleavages between the two great Africa's historic-cultural *Landschaft*: the Septentrional Muslim populations and of the Indian coast (both Arabized to a greater or lesser extent), and the Black Africa proper, the fulcrum lands of Africanity7.

Therefore, based on the recognition of two great civilizational traditions of the continent, the Africanity and Arabic-Islamic space, and given the exacerbation of the activity of extremist Islamic movements, the context seems to agree with the thesis of the clash of civilizations. This is a context with a tremendous civilizational fault line that crosses the entire continent from east to west, strongly identified with the countries that intercalate the Saharan and Sahelian realities, as well as the Horn of Africa (HUNTINGTON, 1997).

Furthermore, the outbreak of Islamic terrorist movements, which act openly in the space of African states and blur the borders consensually accepted since the OAU founding, expose, in the crudest way possible, the dangerous failure of state institutions, as well as multilateral organizations, in protecting the societies e nations they claim to represent.

Thereupon, Africa's institutional political geography acquired a spectral personality, while effective control of the territory changed in favor of forces that brought with them the ruin of African civil societies.

2. Expansionist actions implemented not by European powers but by independent African nations (rightly described as imperialist in manifold studies) also ruined continental integration. Two pro-annexation conflicts are exceptionally emblematic: the Western Sahara and Somalia cases.

Since 1975, Western Sahara has been a scene of a hard confrontation between two leading opponents: the Polisario Front (acronym for Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro, two regions of the Western Sahara), a local nationalist organization defending the independence of former Spanish Sahara, and the Kingdom of Morocco, which claims the annexation of this territory.

Under the decline of Spanish colonial authority, Moroccan nationalists organized the "Green March" on 6 November 1975, a government-sponsored mobilization involving 350,000 people and 20,000 soldiers. They demanded the "reintegration" of Western Sahara into the "Moroccan fatherland," indeed an internationally contested claim8.

Despite that, the Polisario Front proclaimed the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) on 17 February 1976, reinforcing opposition to the Moroccan project and internationalizing the conflict. The polarization of conservative and progressive fields

and East-West antagonism significantly influenced the Western Sahara conflict. This influence is particularly evident in the explicit support of Algeria and Libya for SADR and the encouragement of Morocco by France, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.

Even though Morocco has established control over most of Western Sahara's land and resources, the political-military standoff continued. In 1991, the United Nations facilitated a ceasefire between both parties. However, this truce did not bring peace nor open a real possibility of a political solution, highlighting the tortuous nature of the conflict (BESENYÖ, 2021a and 2010b; KALICKA-MIKOŁAJCZYK, 2020).

Western Sahara remains divided, with Morocco controlling roughly 75% of the total territory and the remaining 25% constituting the so-called Free Zone under the SADR government, which maintains its symbolic capital in the town of Bir Lahlou, near the border with Mauritania. A 2,700 km line of fortifications built by Morocco, forming the Moroccan Western Sahara Wall, Moroccan Sand Wall, or Berm, is exemplary proof of a not solved thorny dispute.

On the pan-African level, the OAU's recognition of SADR motivated Morocco's withdrawal from the organization in 1984, a position reiterated in 2002, when the African Union (AU) also recognized the SADR authority as the sole and legitimate representative of the territory and its people in the continental spectrum. Per contra, demonstrating internal hesitation about the subject, the Kingdom of Morocco joined in 2017 to AU, one of several ambivalent decisions that characterize the OAU/AU political dealings (BESENYÖ, HUDDLESTON et ZOUBIR, 2022).

As a final result, SADR has become exclusively a de jure state and does not enjoy the status of a de facto nation-state: "When Spain left Western Sahara, the inhabitants wanted independence, but Morocco and Mauritania invaded their land, so they were colonized again. Today, *Western Sahara is the last colony in the world with unresolved problems and is close to starting a possible new war*. It is a challenge to the world to find a workable solution for the situation" (BESENYÖ, 2010a: 213, *our emphasis*).

In addition to the Western Sahara case, the provocative issue of Somali irredentism is worth mentioning. In the introductory clause of its Somalian national program, there is a unification clause putting all Somali groups under a single state jurisdiction. The Republic of Somalia resulted from the merger of two former European possessions in 1960, Italian Somalia and British Somalia, becoming a unified state, one of the rare mono-ethnic countries on the continent9.

From the Somalian unification, five spaces should be part of "Greater Somalia": the British and Italian Somalia (original territory of the republic), the Ogaden (or Ethiopian Somalia), a chunk of the former French Somaliland (now Djibouti) and the north-eastern province of Kenya. This proposal is evident in Somalia's national flag, adopted in 1954, which features a five-pointed star in the center, the Star of Unity, evoking the five areas of compact Somali settlement in the Horn of Africa, also known as the Somali Peninsula.

However, Somali nationalism's ambition to unite all clans in a Greater Somalia shaped a project that would sooner or later put it on a collision course with neighboring countries, primarily Ethiopia, a country influential on the Horn of Africa. The hostilities

induced the Ogaden War (1977-1978), in which Ethiopia defeated Somalia, and regional African political antagonisms were again abducted by the East-West conflict, with Ethiopia sponsored by the USSR and Cuba and Somalia by the USA.

As a harbinger of the increasing precariousness of the state apparatus in Africa, it is worth noting that after the defeat in Ogaden, Somalia faced a divisive civil war (1981-present) and fragmented in at least two new proto-state apparatuses, Puntland and Somaliland, each representing different Somali clans.

Until today, the central government in Mogadishu holds only part of the Somalian republic's original space, maintained at the cost of the endless struggle against local warlords and radical Islamic groups.

3. Centrifugal drives have frayed the post-decolonization state-territorial framework, even in mono-ethnic states (how analyzed in the aforementioned Somalian case). The ethnic, regional, and religious problems that seemed to have attenuated between the 1990*s* and mid-2000 have experienced a strong revival, giving rise to several secessionist movements. While the definition of separatist movements may be controversial, it is clear that the political map of Africa is observing the advocacy for new nation-state identities, authentically a balkanization in advance.

A non-exhaustive list of secessionist movements includes Kabylia in Algeria, Cabinda in Angola, Ambazonia in Cameroon, and at least six ethnic-regional movements in Ethiopia, such as Oromia, Ogaden, Tigray, Afar, Amhara, and Sidama. The list continues with Western Togoland (Ghana), Cirenaica and Tripoli (Libya), Azawad (Mali), Biafra and Oduduwa-Yoruba (in Nigeria), Casamance (Senegal), Darfur and Eastern Sudan (in the Republic of Sudan), Zanzibar (Tanzania), and a heterogeneous array of independentist activism in South Africa: Zulu, Venda, Cape Republic movement (or Capexit), and the Pro-Africaner Volkstaat Free State (or Boerestaat, White South-Africans homeland proposal).

This secessionist political upsurge is taking place despite centralization trends and the national identities associated with the framework of the post-colonial countries. Even in Nigeria, a country that maintained its unity at the cost of a terrible civil war (1967-1970), separatist movements have re-emerged among ethnic groups such as the Yoruba and the Igbo (in this case, demanding the revival of the Republic of Biafra).

Political tensions fueled by religious divisions, particularly between Muslim and Christian or Animist communities, are other disrupting factors. In Sudan, since independence in 1956, the distrusting relationship between the central government of Khartoum (Arabic-Muslim) and the southern ethnic groups (mainly Christian) has led to devastating conflicts: The First (1955-1972) and Second Sudanese Civil Wars (1983-2005). As a result, Southern Sudan became an independent state in 2011.

However, instability and conflicts with ethno-regional groups continued in the remaining Republic of Sudan. Khartoum once again repressed peripheral communities, triggering the Darfur War (2003-2020), marked by unprecedented humanitarian tragedy and brutal genocidal actions (BESENYŐ, 2021b).

In the Darfur War, the local non-Arab population was the target of a systematic ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Sudanese government forces and irregular militias known as the *Janjaweed*10. Although largely ignored by the world media, these criminal actions may only be labeled as genocidal. The Sudanese army and Janjaweed units "burned and destroyed hundreds of villages, causing the deaths of tens of thousands of citizens, displaced millions of people, and assaulted and raped thousands of women and girls" (BESENYŐ, 2021b: 41).

It is important to note that the context that tends to make the Sudanese state unworkable is not exclusive to that country. At a broader level, the virulence of disruptive conflicts is shaking and undermining African governance systems to such an extent that Sudanese reality may not repeated only in specific countries but in large continental areas dominated by endless wars.

4. In this cadence of turbulent spatial vortexes and geopolitical disruptions, some countries escape this fate and present themselves as pivotal countries in the political continental space, no longer referenced by any integrationist proposition nor backing an inter-regional economic substantivity.

Therefore, a select group of countries' pivotal nations fills gaps in the face of political continental weaknesses, expressing a possible order in a continent shaken by striking contradictions. The actions of these states end up replacing or supplanting the continent's multilateral bodies.

From this point of view, it is worth commenting on a decisive concept: director, pivotal, or governing state. Roughly speaking, the definition of Director State includes a broad institutional equation with factors such as the capacity of a sovereign state to influence in an organizational, political, ideological, economic, military, and technological way or by the partial combination of all these values, a given regional geographical spectrum with which it structurally interacts and is inserted (WALDMAN, 2013).

We face a group formed by countries with visible tendencies towards self-projection in circumscribed spaces on the continent. Analytically, these regional powers, besides proving the well-known assessment about the non-existence of a leading state on the scale of Africa as a whole, define the structure of political-economic and security, circumscribing concrete actions in regional spaces (ALMEIDA, 2011).

From this perspective, the following Governing States are paradigmatic cases of countries embedded in African spaces in which they stand out as political, cultural, or economic poles:

- Morocco and Algeria in the Maghreb;
- Egypt, brokering the Arab world, North Africa, and the Black African countries;
- Senegal (fundamentally the capital, Dakar metropolis), in West Africa;
- Nigeria, in the Guinean Gulf coast and its hinterland;
- Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda in Central and Eastern Africa;
- Ethiopia, in the Horn of Africa;

• Angola and South Africa, in the central-southern plexus of the continent.

For those who follow, even minimally, the news related to Africa, the growing prominence of this select group of nations is evident. At the same time, it becomes difficult to perceive any support other than those given by the national egoism that directs the protagonism of these nations in a profoundly disunited and lacerated continental scenario where Pan-Africanism increasingly becomes just a memory.

Conclusions

The set of four causalities lines previously commented on, added to the whole discussion of this text, pave two fundamental objective dysfunctions orders in the African political field:

• First, the concrete difficulty of the pan-Africanist movement in implementing a unitary project that prematurely had to give way to the interests that were nested in the nascent state apparatuses seeking its perpetuation;

• Second, the hurdles are also due to the difficulty these new states (or most) had in minimally maintaining their institutional mandates in the economics, security, and political normative capacity.

Of course, regardless of the enormous appeal that the pan-Africanist ideal has aroused throughout Africa and in the overseas diaspora, many obstacles have arisen from a structural weakness typical of any pan-nationalism (pan-Germanism, pan-Arabism, pan-Slavism, pan-Turkism, and the like) in terms of materializing concepts and ideas in the multiple interfaces of concrete reality.

In general, pan-nationalisms (including Pan-Africanism) do not cope well with specificities inherent in projects with a continental scale, not to mention the difficulties of political consensus, because these identity constructions end up hijacked by a given national, political, or social segment, which is generally the one that leads the unification.

In the case of Pan-Africanism, the potential difficulties of a continental-scope project are because all sorts of African territorial specificities intertwine with different social materialities and ethnic, cultural, and religious loyalties, each of which is associated with larger or smaller fractions of the geographic space, reinforcing resistance ahead of any pan-nationalism.

It is imperative to consider that space tends to override ideologies and utopias, especially when they seek to ignore the spatial dimension in its unequal synthesis of specific social times. With its fixed and fluxes networks, space is invested with resilience and directional potential, resisting adjustments with projects and actions detached from its determinations.

In this sense, dealing with the differentiated cadence of the networks and systems that support the specific physiognomies of space becomes mandatory. These can be changed

and revised, but only if the precondition in establishing a dialogue with these determinations is on the table.

Nkrumah's trajectory may exemplify these considerations. As we know, Osagyefo governed the country for only nine years (1957-1969), being overthrown from power by a paralyzing entropy articulating external pressures with anti-Nkrumah groups within the Ghanaian space.

Various forces contrary to his regime, including respected clan chieftaincies, such as the traditional authority of the powerful Ashanti royalty, derailed Nkrumah's regime. In other words, Ghana's internal dynamics dismantled Osagyefo's continental project in his political backyard proper.

In an African prospect, the question about Continental Unity remains difficult because even the victorious old proposal of the politics of kingdoms was, in turn, self-paralyzed by its inability to demonstrate genuine operational capacity.

The current global political *zeitgeist* further problematizes the volitions related to African unity. The dysfunctionality of the allegedly respected multilateral bodies and forums, on a scale that extends from international forums to African local and regional entities, clearly shows contemporary organizations' loss of referential prestige.

The dehydration of state governance and internal geopolitical misdirection in Africa, as well as the insolvency that has characterized pan-African projects, both maximalist and minimalist, not to mention permanent intercurrences of ancient foreign powers and actors (Russia, China, USA, France, Spain, United Kingdom), as well new state protagonists (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, India, Turkey, United Arab Emirates), non-statal actors (Jihadists organizations, global entities, NGOs), and economic agents (finances, mining, agricultural companies), have reached a point where the pan-African odyssey appears imprisoned in a *cul-de-sac*.

From time immemorial, non-Africans have defined Africa, often in less-than-complementary terms. In this context, Pan-Africanism emerged as a bold initiative to fill a significant identity void. The questions it raises about the continent's unity remain not only relevant but also crucial, resonating with us more strongly than ever.

However, the difficulties now posed by an endeavor in this direction make it challenging to anticipate any direction or protagonism the pan-Africanist ideal may take.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

The author is a member of the Editorial Board. The manuscript was handled independently to avoid any conflict of interest.

Notes on Contributors

Maurício Waldman is Senior Researcher of Africa Research Institute - Doctoral School for Safety and Security Sciences of Óbuda University (Budapest, Hungary); author, journalist, and Consultant. As an activist, Waldman collaborated with Chico Mendes and several organizations including Comitê de Apoio aos Povos da Floresta (Forest

People Committee), the African Studies Centre of São Paulo University (USP), and Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação – CEDI (Ecumenical Centre of Documentation and Information, in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro). He also participated in activist movements against dams, anti-nuclear demonstrations, and especially against water pollution in São Paulo. Waldman received his Anthropology M.Sc. degree from USP in 1997. He became Director of the Children Homeless' School of São Paulo in 1998, Director of the Fundação Estadual do Bem Estar do Menor' School in 1999, coordinator of São Paulo Recycling Service in 2000, and Editor of the Brazilian Geographers' Association (AGB) São Paulo Sector from 2002 to 2003. The intellectual trajectory of Maurício Waldman is plural and independent, incorporating works in geography, anthropology, sociology, and international relations.

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NOTES

1. In this context, the Afro-diaspora has always been a generous supporter of pan-African activism. The movement's first conference (London, 1900), convened by the Afro-Caribbean activist Henry Silvester Williams, a Trinidad-born lawyer born in Trinidad, brought together 37 delegates, mainly from the United States, England, and the West Indies.

2. An honorary title popularized after the victory that elected Nkrumah Prime Minister of the Republic of Ghana. Loosely translated from the Twi language, spoken by the Akan, an ethnic group that inhabits the central and southern regions of Ghana, it means "Victorious Leader," "Savior," "Liberator," or "Redeemer."

3. Among the defenders of culture as a first-hand strategy for African integration was Léopold Senghor, for whom cultural Pan-Africanism should precede political Pan-Africanism (FERNANDES, 2009: 88).

4. Since 1956, Morocco has taken its first steps as an independent nation and has pursued an ambitious policy of territorial expansion. In addition to the whole of Mauritania, the Kingdom of Morocco demanded the incorporation of large parts of Saharan Algeria (about one-fifth of the country), northern Mali, all the Castellan colonies of Spanish West Africa (Africa Occidental Española, AOE, made up of Western Sahara and Sidi Ifni), the Spanish Plazas de Soberania and the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, demands justified by the principle of so-called "historical Morocco" and anti-colonial struggles. This geopolitical ideology sowed confusion and resentment because it ignored the opinions of people of the demanded areas and jeopardized the stability of the new African states, including denying Morocco's proper geographical and historical specificities (DE DALMASES Y DE OLABARRÍA, 2022; BROADBENT, 2010).

5. Defining terrorism is a controversial question, often subject to polysemic views and bias. Thus, there is no single internationally accepted definition of what constitutes terrorism, and therefore, thematic scientific literature abounds with competing definitions and typologies. Regardless, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), the most comprehensive report on terrorist events in the world, published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), takes a comprehensive approach. It defines a terrorist act as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a state and non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation." (GTD 2018). This concept determines that terrorism is not only physical attacks but also includes the psychological impact perpetrated on societies, providing a foundation for understanding terrorism for terrorism studies and security (Apud GTD 2018).

6. The toponym Sahel comes from the Arabic *Sahil* (ساحل), which means border or frontier. It forms a 500–700-kilometer strip between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea and extends across the entire African continent. From an orographic and biogeographical point of view, the Sahel is a natural biome between the drier Sahara to the north and the more humid savannas to the south. As the "beach of the Sahara," the Sahelian countries blend influences from the Islamic world from the north with Indigenous African cultures.

7. The long odyssey of humanity in African space, spanning millennia, favored vigorous historical and cultural exchanges, paving the way, especially the south of the Sahara, to a complex sedimentation of common civilizational traits, which anthropology and sociology devoted to the continent define as Africanity, central matrix to the unity idea for the continent. The concept refers to the cultural, sociological, geographical, and historical interrelationship between hundreds of ethnic groups, encompassing all Sub-Saharan populations, based on common cultural standards.

8. According to the International Court of Justice, the Moroccan claim concerning a shared history with Western Sahara "was insufficient to prove that there had ever been *de facto* Moroccan authority over the territory." Based on the evidence presented, the Court decided that as there was "no proof that Morocco had ever collected taxes on the territory, there was nothing to prove Moroccan authority" (BESENYÖ, 2009: 213).

9. Mono-ethnic countries are uncommon on the continent, resulting from its multi-millennial cultural evolution. Only Somalia, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, and the Comoros archipelago are home to an ethnically homogeneous national community.

10. *Janjaweed* is a generic term for irregular militias operating in Darfur who present themselves as Arabs, although they are usually people of mixed Arab or Arabized indigenous with African ancestry.