The political economy of Pan-Africanism
Imagination and renaissance

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Introduction

The current economic and political landscape of Africa is hardly permissive to promote sustainable economic and social development. A new Pan-Africanism approach and compatible political economy institutions are necessary for an integrated and dynamic economic system to emerge and facilitate socio-economic transformation and renaissance. Pan-Africanism as a movement and an ideology, with the necessary updates to serve the new generation of Africans, could be used to promote a sustainable, optimal, and vibrant economic system in the continent and unleash the collective potential power of Africans to liberate themselves from abject poverty, destitution, and marginalization.

The post-colonial development experience of Africa has been disappointing and isolated efforts of countries to initiate development without reforming the old and exploitative institutions of the colonial regimes have largely ended up in failures and stagnation. The legacies of extremely exploitative institutions of slavery and colonialism were so burdensome and deeply traumatizing that African countries found it difficult to overcome. At the same time, the newly independent states were fragile, and the initial conditions were so desperate, that they provided little opportunity for serious reform and economic vitality. Whereas the challenges of underdevelopment were daunting, the necessary human and investment capital was in short supply and the poverty trap was firmly in place. Promising potential for development were available, and the continent enjoys generous endowment of natural resources, and yet this potential had to be realized through strategic planning, cooperation, visionary leadership, hard work, and the spirit of mutual prosperity. The realization of the huge potential for development in turn required bold and pragmatic institutional reforms that could improve effective mobilization and allocation of resources, optimal degree of specialization, and articulation of the revealed comparative advantage of Africa for sustainable development.

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Pan-Africanism was inspired to fight injustice, brutal crimes against humanity, and exploitation perpetrated on Africans in the form of slavery, colonialism, and racism. The struggle against these evils and their remnant legacies continues to this day. And yet, it was ultimately the economic liberation of Africans that would ensure the achievement of the ideals of Pan-Africanism. To this effect, the idealism of the Pan-Africanism movement needed to be grounded on fundamental shared values about the dignity and basic rights of individual Africans and serve as a new framework for economic liberation, mutual prosperity, and shared destiny of Africans.

Political independence of Africa provided a new opportunity for economic liberation and development. There was broad understanding on the ultimate goals and efforts to use Pan Africanism to facilitate sustainable and shared development (Nkrumah 1963, 173–75; Rostow 1960, 6). There was also a pragmatic realization of the fact that the institutions of colonialism, by deliberate design, could not serve as basis for sustainable economic development of the newly independent African countries. And major reforms to replace coercive and extractive institutions by productive, inclusive, and democratic institutions was a policy priority. And yet, governments across the continent largely failed to do away with the exploitative and extractive economic structures.

Reforming institutions is always difficult and requires coordinated and credible collective actions. However, most of the African governments were not able to mobilize the necessary political and social capital to undertake such bold measures. As a result, with a few exceptions, the post-colonial African experience demonstrates lack of leadership to initiate effective reform measures for structural economic transformation. The opportunities for bold reform were lost and remained largely squandered. It is critically important to address these challenges within the framework of Pan-Africanism if the continent is to turn the opportunities into reality.

This chapter develops a political economy argument whose central thesis is that Pan-Africanism has considerable potential to promote economic and political development with affinity to mutual development if it can create collective solidarity to eliminate deep-rooted vested interests in protecting extractive institutions that doomed a sustainable and inclusive development process. In this context, we argue that it is time to make use of the power of imagination and innovate a new set of political economic strategies that focus on rebuilding the pillars of horizontal and vertical integration and synchronization of policies and practices. Most of these initiatives are predicated, however, by the existence of a functioning and inclusive political and economic institutional framework across countries on which Pan-African economic and political order is built to shape the collective behavior of Africans. We firmly believe and make argument that the fundamental and priority reforms are not beyond the capacity of contemporary African governments to deliver if they are committed, and have the necessary incentives, to steadily eliminate coercive and exploitative policies and institutions in coordination within the framework and spirit of Pan-Africanism. While it takes radical institutional reforms of revolutionary proportions across Africa to realize these objectives, we must also recognize that the 21st century brave world we are living in does not seem to accommodate or cooperate unless Africans earn their collective bargaining power.

A tale of an idea whose time has come

Pan Africanism, from its early inception, has been a movement as well as an ideology for collective liberation and freedom. It is a shared spirit of the African for liberation, freedom,
justice, and development. While what the idea aspires to promote is clear enough there is ambiguity with respect to the conceptual domain of Pan-Africanism.

What is Africa, African, and Africanity somewhat remain points of contention. This has its influence on the context in which the Pan African movement is expected to embrace and operate within the framework of Africa and beyond. Who is African and what defines Africanity was a subject of academic controversy that shapes the discourse on the Pan-African movement. Unless we are clear about the players, it would not be conceivable to articulate the ideals of the movement. The source of this controversy emanates from a valid observation that Africans who reside in Africa do not have or show the same degree of affinity to Africanity (Mazrui 2009, 36–37; Eze 2013, 681–82). The issue of where to set the domain of contemporary Pan Africanism as black movement or an African movement is not settled even if the two movements share objectives and ideals. This is compounded by the broader scope of the African domain within the diaspora who have evolved as African Aliens as well as Alien Africans all over the world. The first group were subjected to slave trade and including their descendants who have had little if any meaningful current contacts with their ancestors in Africa while the latter group refers to the exiled Africans from the brutalities of the governments of their country of origin or from the vagaries of economic destitution. It is apparent that a movement which is based on such a loose concept might remain contentious and needs further clarity.

With respect to what Pan-Africanism stands for, there are diverse views and perspectives. Starting from the very definition of the concept, we encounter ambiguity. For instance, Kodjoe consider Pan Africanism as the acceptance of oneness of all African people and the commitment for the betterment of all people of African descent (Kodjoe 1986), while Esedebe defines the concept as a political and cultural phenomenon that regards Africa, Africans, and African descendants abroad as a unit (Esedebe 1994, 5–8). A simpler approach focuses on the domain for two sets of people that currently reside in Africa and the African Diaspora to be eligible for inclusion in the domain of Pan-Africanism (Fosu 1999, 8). These perspectives are instructive and yet remain imprecise, and leave us with ambiguity in what the movement really is all about and its domains. Africa is indeed the cradle of mankind and civilization and in a way, we are all Africans. What is apparent and emphasized in these views is that unity of Africans, and yet they are not clear how to accommodate the diversity within the African domain and remain relevant within the scope of the movement.

These are valid academic concerns and reflect layers of context. And yet at a deeper level, we argue, the domain of Pan-Africanism needs to be defined by the very spirit and values of the movement and what it aspires to achieve. As a complex and evolving concept, Africanity could not convincingly be defined by the color of the skin, ethnicity, kinship, or geography. We contend that an African is whoever finds Africa her/his physical, spiritual, emotional, and social home – a true home to live in peace, freedom, hope, and fulfillment. This conceptualization accepts that who resides at this august home land deserves the respect, care, community, and goodwill of their fellows. It opposes exploitation, repression, violence, neglect, and deprivation of rights. It is also a journey of self-discovery and consciousness to embrace the spirit, internalize its values, and act upon those principles that enshrine Pan-Africanism. It is argued hence that Pan-Africanism, however one affiliates oneself to it, refers to the movement to liberate the African from the bonds and legacies of slavery, colonialism, racism, repression, and to ensure fundamental economic and political rights. The movement has the moral responsibility and authority to defend and support fellow Africans, and at the same time exert pressure on whatever forces, be they foreign or home grown, that disturb
the African home and hamper the real liberalization and prosperity of the African person. It is important to note that the spirit of Pan-Africanism is earned and not bestowed by mere accident of birth. One earns Pan-Africanity by embracing humanity, shared concern for the welfare of fellow Africans, upholding its values, and doing active engagement to promote it.

The inspiration for the birth of Pan-Africanism was the struggle for justice, dignity, liberation, freedom, and equal opportunity that Africans collectively and individually aspire to achieve in the world. Pan-Africanism was born as a movement in response to gross violations and crimes committed by foreign forces and their domestic collaborators. Africans indeed have diverse identities and yet share values on an extensive level that the concept of a modern notion of African nation is effectively invoked to anchor the future development of the continent (Muchie 2000, 298; Moges 2015, 61). Pan-Africanism should be based on the seedling bed of the contemporary African sphere that aspires to consolidate the solidarity and shared values of all Africans. The movement should also recognize contemporary issues, discriminations, biases that the African faces not only in the diaspora but also within Africa.

The Pan-African movement is and should be anchored on critical values and rights that all human beings should enjoy irrespective of their country of origin, culture, religion, place of residence, or any other designations. Africans are subject to brutal and extensive abuses and xenophobic violence by their fellow Africans and such cruel behaviors are not only unacceptable but also must be condemned unanimously by those who share the spirit of Pan-Africanism. When the freedom and liberties of any African is violated and the potential of generations of Africans are squandered, that amounts to breaching the values and spirit of the movement. In this regard, Africa has so much to grapple with and must innovate policies and implementation mechanism to uphold basic values and rights of their fellow Africans. These protections have far reaching implications that promote the ideals of Pan Africanism as well as making the world a much better place for all.

Pan-Africanism was motivated and driven by political imperatives and it was a response to the urgent demands for liberation of Africa from European colonialism. The political liberation was the most urgent objective of Pan-Africanism and yet the movement had objectives beyond political liberation. The central and enduring theme of the movement has remained to be the total economic, social, cultural, racial, and political liberation and development of the African Nation. The organized movement was born among the African diaspora. However, the center of gravity of the movement was and remains to be at its home land in Africa while the diaspora remains an active and progressive agent of the process. The challenge has been how to effectively use the massive but fragmented human, natural, innovative, entrepreneurial, intellectual, and social capital of Africa to promote sustainable and inclusive development that consolidates the power of Africa.

The experiences of post-colonial Africa have been largely dismal. The priorities of the nation state stood in tension against the aspirations of Pan-Africanism. Leaders of post-colonial Africa did not manage to replace the extractive and coercive institutions of colonialism with more inclusive, creative, and democratic systems. Even those with aspirations to embrace the democratic system soon fell to the temptations of continuing the coercive institutions of authoritarianism and repression. The disregard and indifference towards violence and discrimination against Africans within Africa and abroad are grave moral, ethical, and political failures that require immediate attention to prevent further erosion of the spirit of Pan-Africanism.

The macro perspective of the Pan-Africanism movement was dominated by rhetorical statements by political leaders whose practical constraint and policy priorities at the national level would hardly allow them to function at supra-national institutions. As a result, and
despite their rhetoric, leaders of the newly independent nation states across the continent developed the infrastructure for centralization, repression, and authoritarianism. The ideals of the rule of law and the emancipation of Africans from the legacy of coercion were eventually shelved and a new brand of autocratic and dictatorial forces took shape in one form or another. Those who survived and consolidated political power in this political cannibalism were the most brutal and cruel among us who had the brazen will to power through whatever means available. This had devastating effects on the lives of Africans and the very spirit of Pan-Africanism.

The political process by which parties come to power shape the way decisions are made both at national and continental levels. The continental organizations have been mere clubs of dictators and autocratic rulers with very limited, if any, legitimacy to represent the interest of their population. This limited the capacity of these organizations to engage the broad masses and to cultivate mutual affinity and trust across diverse communities. Unlike the anti-colonial struggle, the post-liberation movement did not cultivate a continental wave to engage the newly emerging nation states (Padmore 1972; Young 1982). The Pan-Africanism rhetoric hence stood parallel to, and sometimes in conflict with, national practices. As a result, the new nation states were largely preoccupied by local issues and played safe within the realities of the cold war world. These movements and experiments could not undo the legacy of extractive and coercive institutions that dominated the African continent during the colonial rule. Instead, more coercive and brutal institutions emerged orchestrated by the local elites with help from their foreign patrons.

Despite modest efforts, Pan-Africanism largely lost dynamism before its momentum was sufficiently built to transform institutions and practices across the continent. The nation states failed to recognize the potential that collective effort under the auspices of Pan-Africanism could have provided for their mutual development. Instead, short sighted policies and lack of visionary leadership reduced cooperation and mutual trust among governments and kept the ideals of Pan-Africanism at the margin. Nationalist sentiments still prevail and hamper sustained effort to build continental institutions for sustainable development. Governments that came to political power through all forms of non-democratic ways remain reluctant to submit to the consent and aspirations of their subjects and upholding to the principles of democratic institutions. Achieving the minimum requirements of democratic mandates and institutions such as the rule of law, the consent of the electorate, the check-and-balance in the exercise of political power, accountability, and transparency in public policy making are conspicuous by their absence in most of contemporary Africa.

The coercive and extractive institutions have remained in place and the elite makes effective use of them for enriching itself at the expense of the masses. Whereas the cost of the conventional system is huge in terms of lost opportunities and standard of living for the masses, the cost is spread across powerless and voiceless families who are caught in the vicious cycle of repression and poverty. However, this system rewards the few organized elites extremely well and the intensity of support and protection grows over time with what is at stake. What the ordinary African demands is nothing extraordinary. It is freedom from exploitation, freedom of movement, and opportunities to earn a decent living. These demands are within the capacity of African governments to deliver if they undertake the necessary recognition of these natural and human rights, and pursue policies to that effect.

Beyond the national efforts, it is necessary to set the framework of operation at continental level. The fate of more than a billion Africans could not depend on the goodwill of governments across the continent. It must be anchored on empowering the African, her political, human, economic, and social rights and adopting the institutions to deliver. This
requires visionary imagination and innovative leadership to establish a functioning institutional framework and do away with extractive economic and coercive political institutions to recast the very relation of Africa with itself and the rest of the world. It is within this perspective that the power of imagination could be effectively used to unleash the potential, and yet unfulfilled, power of Africans is desperately needed. It takes, at minimum, dignifying the African person and subjecting political power to her/his consent and upholding the rule of law and equal access to opportunities.

**Development aspirations and squandered opportunities**

The perspective of the previous section highlights the evolution and spirit of Pan-Africanism. One of the typical features of post-colonial Africa is the failure of leadership to make effective use of the spirit of Pan-Africanism to initiate and sustain economic development. African governments could not undertake the necessary institutional reforms that could have liberated the individual African and her communities to realize their considerable potential for development. For far too long, despite the receptiveness of Africans to innovative ideas and incentives, economic stagnation and squandered opportunities were predominately the rule rather than the exception across Africa (Meredith 2014). Africa lost ground against the rest of the world and the cumulative effect has been devastating.

The African economies were not only poor and backward at the dawn of independence but also highly exploitative. Moreover, the countries were too small and fragmented that most of them did not constitute a viable political economy landscape. The dual economic structures of predominantly subsistence agriculture in conjunction with pockets of mining and basic processing industries faced with the challenges of industrialization and job creation for a rapidly growing labor force. The dominant share of the labor force is left to scrape a living in low productive agricultural and informal sectors. The overall post-colonial economic performance has been largely dismal, and economic stagnation and poverty dominated the continent; and Africa found it hard even to maintain its relative economic position in the brave and competitive world economic space.

African countries widely adopted a state-led economic development approach that emphasized the critical role of the state in decision making and resource allocation with central planning. This process marginalized market forces and the private sector in resource mobilization and allocation decisions. While the government sector has significant positive roles to play in economic development processes, marginalization of the private sector or its exclusion from playing a part commensurate to its capacity was the wrong approach. These policy choices contributed to further weakening an already weak private sector and eventually for the government to control the commanding heights of the economy. Economic development requires effective and coordinated effort of both the private sector as well as the government sector in economic affairs.

There have been competing theories in explaining the poor growth performance of the African economies (Easterly and Levine 1997; Landes 1999; Beinhocker 2007; Venables 2010; Acemoglu and Robinson 2013). Most, if not all, agree that economic growth performance is highly dependent on economic policies and institutions in which economic agents undertake their decisions and respond to overall incentive structures. Sustainable economic growth and development requires countries putting their policies and institutions right and responsive. It is the decisions of individuals in their daily struggle to earn a living that cumulatively shape the aggregate operation of an economy. Africans have shown their creativity and skill to adapt and earn a living even in the most hostile circumstances.
Ordinary Africans make rational decisions given their binding constraints despite the excessive violations of their legitimate rights to earn their daily bread. It is not hard to imagine that such talented and creative people could successfully improve their lot if they have the freedom and the opportunity to do so. The role of the private sector is crucial and irreplaceable in the process whereas the government sector could play only a supplementary role.

The experiences of newly industrialized countries support that the government sector can play a critical role in the development process by addressing the challenges of market failure and a weak private sector. The relative role of the private-public sector in economic affairs is dynamic and should be viewed as an ever evolving process. Market failures are pervasive in developing countries and so do government failures. The art of economic policy-making demands balancing the two forces in a pragmatic and realistic way. The private sector in Africa has been repressed and stunted to such an extent that it operates far below its potential in subsistence and informal sectors. Despite tentative efforts to liberalize and reform economic policies, most of the African economies operated in a hostile policy environment for market and private sector development. Non-market forces exercise commanding power in the economy and often abuse their power to extract whatever small surpluses that are generated in the economic system. Abuse of political power for extracting economic surplus from the poor has, unfortunately, been the prevailing medium to which state and government apparatus were put in operation in the African political economy landscape. Liberalization reform measures have improved the role of the market and the private sector in an increasing number of African countries and yet there is much more to be desired before these forces are given the roles that commensurate with their potential.

The global economy has been growing steadily over the long run, mainly driven by technological progress. Despite the promising potential, due to both external but mainly self-induced policy distortions, the post-colonial African economies managed to grow on average at a rate of 0.79 percent per annum for almost the past five decades. This was far below the global average of 1.54 percent and the average rate of 2.91 percent for developing economies. Such dismal economic growth performance, whatever the pattern of income distribution or redistribution, could not allow a sustainable rise in living standard or alleviate poverty in African countries. African economies have lost a lot of ground to the global economic competition to secure better job opportunities and living standards for their population. Africa should have grown twice faster just to maintain its relative economic status of the 1960s. In other words, had the continental economy managed to grow at a modest average rate comparative to other developing countries, African average real per capita income would have been about US$5,200 by 2017. The actual income per capita of US$1,911 is only about a third of this level.

Currently, an entire continent of Africa, with a population of 1.3 billion and an estimated labor force of about 415 million, manages to produce goods and services in aggregate only about a third of what a tiny country of Japan produces with a labor force of just 66 million (United Nations 2017). This is a clear indicator of the level of squandered opportunity that we have lost in the last half century. It is an opportunity that awaits to be realized in the future should we have what it takes to exploit it effectively. It is imperative for the current generation of Africans to critically reflect and find out what forces hampered our collective productive capacity and doomed us to squander our human and natural resource capital. It is only after such deep recognition and realization that we can make the necessary reforms that inculcate a meritocratic, innovative, cooperative, and productive system for mutual economic prosperity.
This economic situation, coupled with a rapid population growth rate of 2.6 percent per annum saw the total population grow from 285 million in 1960 to nearly 1.3 billion now, has made the African situation increasingly unsustainable. Moreover, the African economy has increasingly become marginal in the global production, investment, trade, and innovation sphere. Africa has lost, from its already small role in the global trade regime, from about 6 percent share in global export and import of merchandise during the 1960s to the current 2 to 3 percent. The situation is also similar with respect to attracting investment resources for creating job opportunities and increasing productivity of labor. African economies, despite small variation across economies and sectors, attract just a mere 3 percent of the global investment flows. The repercussion of such gross failures and squandered opportunities is significant on the economic, political, and social life of Africans. The combination of these elements has kept too many Africans trapped in poverty and hopeless destitution. As a result, the welfare of the ordinary people remained at its chronic poverty level and failed to improve over decades.

African economies are not only poor but also exhibit high and worsening patterns of income distribution and inequality (Moges 2014, 51–52). These are symptoms of an economic system that squandered its opportunities and potential to mobilize both its natural and human resources to create a dynamic and inclusive economic system to benefit and empower the ordinary African. These factors, in combination with unmet demands of a rapidly increasing African youth for educational and job opportunities, have perpetuated a failed and broken economic system and fed into the urge to migrate in search of better opportunities. African governments and their distorted policies are the primary reasons for the failure of these economies to deliver economic growth and job opportunities for Africans. A very brutal but symbolic manifestation of such desperate failure and hopelessness is the decision of an increasing number of African youth to cross deserts, oceans, the Mediterranean sea, hostile host communities, and more to join the rank of African Aliens across the world. This is the most humiliating but real testament to the gross failures of African governments and their repressive violations of the basic rights of Africans to lead a decent life in their own countries and communities.

The long-term development hurdle of African countries has been the prevalence of extractive economic and political institutions that protected the few elites at the expense of the masses. These institutions were imposed on Africans by coercion, either by foreigners or by local elites. Africans have been deprived of economic development and condemned to abject poverty mainly because of the weaknesses of law and order, property rights, violation of political rights, and legacies of these systems. Africa is characterized by complex diversity, ethnic and linguistic fragmentation, and geographical variations (Easterly and Levine 1997; Easterly 2006; Venables 2010). Slavery and slave trade were coercive and brutal systems of extractive institutions. Moreover, the legacy of slavery and slave trade across African communities has been such that there is a deep-rooted suspicion and mistrust across communities that survived the test of time and the leadership of post-colonial Africa could not effectively address.

It is hence apparent that creating political, cultural, and institutional affinity across African countries by necessity involves remodeling, reforming, and replacing with new inclusive economic and political institutions. The foundation for mutual trust, cooperation, solidarity, mutual prosperity can be planted only if credible reforms are put in place and Africans embrace and implement them with their own initiatives. Cooperation cannot be sustainable when the parties operate under repression. Building the minimum benchmark of institutions of rights, freedoms, duties, responsibilities play their share in cultivating shared concerns and
dreams that citizens aspire to achieve. This is a slow and challenging process but there is no short cut to achieving a sustainable, continental wave of momentum that serves the economic and social development of Africa. And this can be achieved only through visionary leadership that recognizes the dismal situation in which Africans find themselves and realize the huge opportunity squandered by lack of effective and practical leadership.

Whereas extractive economic and political institutions may not necessarily prevent episodes of economic growth, such an approach could not generate sustainable and shared economic growth and development. The elites have vested interest in growing the economy so long as they continue to extract surplus from the system. However, by depriving the masses of the opportunity for economic security, the system prevents creative innovation and progress in structural transformation processes of their economy. The failure to cultivate inclusive and shared growth process, and prevalence of extractive political and economic institutions, much more than ethno-linguistic fragmentation, doom countries to stagnation and their population to abject poverty (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013). This robs society of the opportunity to initiate and sustain an inclusive economic system that rewards innovation and promotes the accumulation of physical and human capital in the system as well as development affinity and mutual prosperity.

In the context of Pan-Africanism, the ultimate motivating and uniting force would be the emergence of a vibrant Pan-African nationalism that would make it possible for Africans to cultivate shared developmental, social, and political affinities across the continent (Nantanmbu 1998; Walters 1993; Muchie 2000, 298–99; Moges 2015, 61–62; Moges and Muchie 2019, 48–49). African nationalism could emerge only if the ethnic and tribal loyalty gives way to a new consciousness among the African communities. Africans indeed have the essential attributes and affinities that bond them as a solid nation with shared legacies, histories, and roots that remain to be developed across the continent. The new consciousness could express itself in the eventual freedom of Africans to move across countries and boundaries without losing their linkage with their community of origin and exploring the opportunities that the continental economic and socio-political environment provides.

Pan-Africanism in the 21st century needs to address the economic welfare of the African as well as the political and social development aspiration of the population. This in turn requires robust economic growth that catches up with the rest of the world and generates leverage to reduce poverty for a mutually beneficial growth process. The African continent has, for long, failed to attract foreign direct investment both in terms of volume as well as quality of technological innovation to better exploit the potential of the continental economies (World Bank 2012, 2019; UNCTAD 2019). Domestic saving and investment performance have also been weak. These have been prominent features of these economies for a long time. The African economies largely remain starved of investment resources and have had a depressed level of labor productivity, which represent lost opportunities for both Africa and the rest of the world.

The Africa nation? The power of imagination for renaissance

Africa was the cradle of mankind and civilization with complex social organizations and a sophisticated economic system for their era (Meredith 2014). The rise and fall of African civilizations and the ordeal that followed point to the danger of a fragmented effort to protect Africans from newly emerging global powers. The emergence of global capitalism and the technology that facilitated distant explorations and massive expansion for fortunes left societies like Africa’s vulnerable and weak. This gave rise to uncontrolled and devastating
exploitation of the African labor force to feed into the agricultural production and processing system. The African was forced away from his home and increasingly became an object and considered as less human to be possessed by others, and those remaining in the homeland remained weak and vulnerable. This was not only exploitation but complete reconstruction of the very idea of an African as an inferior race. This extraordinary crime and those who officially perpetrated it largely remain unaccountable for the grave crime against humanity. The legacy of this brutal crime remains to exert its negative influence on Africans for generations.

The driving force behind the Pan-African movement was political aspiration that sought to unite Africans against slavery, colonialism, and racism. From its inception by the direct victims of the system among the African diaspora, the movement served as an ideological foundation for a united purpose and struggle against injustice and crime. The projects of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and now the African Union (AU), closely followed this political philosophy and strategy. And yet, the ultimate goals of political independence were to facilitate economic development and improve the standard of living of Africans. This objective has not been achieved yet and the failures shadow the movement.

The African Union could play an instrumental role to mobilize Africans to cope better against the challenges of a rapidly changing world, to create a conducive environment for competitive advantage, and initiate the process of renaissance. By the recent record of the continental institutions, this might sound too much to expect and destined for bitter disappointment. As it stands now, the African Union is not capable or effective to represent the aspirations, priorities, and dreams of more than a billion Africans. However, we remain optimistic that the power of imagination and visionary leadership can convert this latent power of the AU to respond to the urgencies and priorities of the African masses and earn their support at the grassroots level. It takes careful reorientation and reformulation of the power base of the AU to spring from the grassroots constituency and institutionalize their voices through formal processes of representation. This in turn requires bold and transparent reform measures that eventually turn the African Union into a pillar for Pan Africanism.

The first set of doable measures include synchronization of the policies of member countries and representation at the Union from elected politicians. This could be followed by measures that ensure freedom of movement of Africans within the continent for better contribution and opportunities. Promoting free trade in goods and services increases further the market opportunities as well as the mutual interdependency within the African economic space. Further measures to improve the flow of intra-African investment, effective allocation of resources, and the creation of a market environment could consolidate the economic foundation and capabilities of African economies.

Nation building requires a solid and shared foundation of values and affinity among the players and the population in the political, economic, and social space. Africa, with its complex and huge diversity, does not seem to have the conventional seeds to grow into a nation. Nonetheless, we argue that Africans have critical shared values and basic ideals that could start the long and difficult process of nation building. These strategies could face challenges and yet they are achievable provided that the framework in which African governments earn their political power reflect the will, concern, and interests of African citizens at the grassroots level. This is the way that synchronization of policy and values come into play and facilitate the transition from passive to active strategy of the economic and political integration and economic inter-depends of Africa. These are measures that would facilitate the very objectives of Pan-Africanism and the establishment of a united African Nation.
The manner and speed of establishing a political union on the continent, and the ideals of building the African nation, have remained a contentious issue. There are strong passions on both sides of the argument and given the current disparities across countries, it takes time to consolidate the base. However, the strategy needs to identify the priority areas and work towards synchronized policies and practices to cultivate continental institutional framework. Once these building pillars are set in place, we argue that innovative leadership and mutual interest could bridge the gap and effectively direct the latent power towards genuine representative, democratic, inclusive, and humane system of government that could pave the way to a workable economic and political space for collective development and affinity to Africa.

It is imperative to emphasize, however, that economic integration could hardly be successful until, and unless, African countries are seriously implementing the measures to do away with extractive economic institutions that are supported by coercive political institutions. A progressive continental institution could not be built by the sum of extractive national institutions that dominate the continental political economy landscape. Creative and productive economic institutions and a representative system of democratic institutions are necessary to create the enabling environment to unleash the underutilized development prospects of Africa. It takes learning and adapting the experiences of successful inclusive institutions to make the transition from economic and political stagnation to sustainable economic growth and democratic political system.

It is therefore important to emphasize that Pan-Africanism in the economic and socio-political sphere requires setting the necessary conditions for inclusive economic and political institutions at national and sub-national levels. The proposal for African unity is a call for freedom, basic rights, and equitable opportunities for all Africans now and the generations to come. It is plausible to argue that such objectives would have the support of the masses and no ground for fear of the integration process. And yet, there are possible causes for opposition that come from the local elites whose vested interest is to keep the status quo despite its mediocracy and disastrous outcomes. The masses, however, are still deprived of their political voices, rights, and freedoms in most of the member countries. Their choice and priorities, which are in line with the spirit of Pan Africanism, could be heard only when democratic institutions replace coercive and exploitative systems of institutions. This clearly shows that the path towards effective Pan-Africanism is built on the foundations of inclusive and democratic institutional benchmarks across member countries.

Concluding remarks

The political economy of Pan-Africanism is faced with strategic challenges and its prospects depends on the policy choices that Africans make at a national and continental level to operationalize the power of their collective imagination for renaissance. The current strategy has focused on building national and regional building blocks that are expected to develop into continental economic and political communities. This approach, despite its seemingly practical imperatives, has in built features that weaken the spirit of Pan-African nationalism that aspires to realize the massive latent potential trapped and fragmented throughout Africa. Realizing the economic and political potential of Pan-Africanism, we argue, requires recognizing and internalizing the true values and spirit of an African seeking to achieve dignity, freedom, and opportunities for development. This in turn requires building inclusive economic and political institutions with supportive systems of laws and policies that would serve as an engine to promote an integrated and sustainable African development.

Pan-Africanism does make political and economic sense. The current series of extractive economic and political institutions are the central bottlenecks for economic and political
development. It is imperative for African countries to pursue synchronized and imaginative reform policies that appeal to ordinary Africans and address their challenges to cultivate shared values and policies for an empowered and united Africa. The urgent task is to build an effective framework of policy reform that enables African communities to replace extractive and coercive institutions by participatory and inclusive institutions for sustainable economic development.

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