

Rethinking *Pax Africana* in Multipolar Disorder: A Genealogical Return to Pan-African Futures

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ABSTRACT

This paper rethinks Pax Africana amid multipolar disorder using a genealogical approach grounded in Mazrui's work. It traces how competing sovereignty visions institutionalized in the OAU, AU, and RECs created a persistent gap between aspiration and practice. It argues Africa's insecurity stems from internal colonial bifurcations and contested citizenship, and external subordination within a racial capitalist order. Recovering Pax Africana as worldmaking, the paper contends fragmentation intensifies proxy war, interventions, debt and militarization yet offers strategic openings. Renewal requires internal democratic reconstruction and external continental autonomy, moving beyond tinkering to transform both the postcolonial state and unequal international order.

TAGS:

Africa; Pax-Africana; African Unity; Multipolarity and Africa

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Introduction

As global multipolarity deepens and its implications for the African continent become increasingly visible, calls for a collective African response are once again on the rise. African policy institutions, diplomats, and intellectuals are increasingly framing the contemporary moment as a structural turning point for the continent. Reports such as the CDRC Digest (April 2026), Abdul Mohammed's *Africa's Multilateral Reckoning* (2026), El Ghassim Wane's *Africa at a Crossroads*, and the ACCORD Policy & Practice Brief by Djinnit, Mayaki, and Wane (2026) have converged around a common analysis: the liberal multilateral order that shaped Africa's post-Cold War positioning is fragmenting, being replaced by intensified geopolitical competition, transactional diplomacy, unstable alignments, and weakening multilateralism. This analysis concludes that the changing global dynamics require urgent action from African Union leadership, comparable to the strategic repositioning along the lines proposed by Salim Ahmed Salim during the 1990s for the transition from the Organization of African Union (OAU) to the AU as a means for Africa to seize the moment, assert its role in the global arena, and implement the unfinished dreams of the 1990s.

The current policy discourse correctly identifies the crisis of liberal internationalism and the growing strategic centrality of Africa within an emerging multipolar conjuncture. For instance, the CDRC paper describes this as a "moment of reckoning," drawing parallels with the 1990s when the collapse of the Cold War order and the reconfiguration of liberal internationalism generated pressures for institutional recalibration across the continent. Similarly, the ACCORD and related interventions frame the present conjuncture through the unresolved promises and implementation crises of the post-Cold War settlement. They also underline how fragmentation at the global level reproduces continental and subregional instability, deepens state weakness and constitutional crises, and makes African unity a "strategic necessity."

Yet these interventions remain largely confined within what Robert W. Cox (1981) described as a "problem-solving" orientation. They take the existing international order – sovereign nation-states, inherited colonial borders, the UN–Bretton Woods framework,

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and the AU's intergovernmental architecture – as historically fixed rather than politically constructed. Consequently, their concern becomes how Africa can navigate the existing order more effectively rather than how that order itself emerged, whose interests it serves, or how it might be transformed. Lost popular and intellectual anti-colonial possibilities, earlier Pan-African visions, and pre-1990 struggles over global transformation remain marginal to the analysis. As a result, the horizon of these policy prescriptions remains largely confined within the liberal praxis of both the postcolonial state and the international system. The 'popular' as defined here is the radical agency of what authors Branch and Mampilly (2015) term 'political society' – the urban underclass of youth, the unemployed, unstable workers, peasants, whose protests and aspirations aim at systemic transformation with direct social relevance to their everyday lives. Unlike critical theory, today's reform-oriented 'civil society' operates within problem-solving policy frameworks. By mirroring mainstream IR theory, these frameworks avoid challenging the status quo; consequently, their 'solutions' only reinforce the systemic problems they aim to cure (Cox 1981).

Global political order is currently undergoing profound transformation marked by instability, uncertainty, and geopolitical rivalry within an increasingly fragmented multipolar landscape. For Africa, these shifts have intensified existing patterns of insecurity through expanding militarized interventions, transactional politics, weakening multilateral governance, and the reproduction of old and new forms of dependency. These external dynamics are mirrored internally in strained state–society relations, politicized identity, contested citizenship, uneven development, and recurring crises of governance. African in/security, therefore, cannot be adequately understood through a simple distinction between domestic disorder and international crisis; rather, both are historically interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

This paper adopts a Du Boisian premise that the domestic and international are historically inseparable (Du Bois 1903). Du Bois's theory of the global "colour line" structures modern world order through racial hierarchy and imperial power rather than formal equality, exposing the entanglement between democracy and racial empire. Contemporary global politics continue to reproduce this contradiction, as liberal international norms coexist with persistent practices of racial inequality, selective intervention, and external domination (Mampilly 2022). From this perspective, African statehood reflects what Grovogui (2002) conceptualizes as "negative sovereignty" – formal independence without the material or economic foundations necessary for autonomous political and developmental agency.

Against this background, the paper advances a genealogical approach that situates *Pax Africana* (Mazrui 1967) within the longer history of Pan-Africanism, tracing its promises, institutional compromises, unrealized political imaginaries, and struggles over worldmaking. It revisits critical historical moments: the 1960s decolonization era and Pan-African state formation; the contested emergence and defeat of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) alongside Bandung and Non-Aligned visions of global transformation; and the post–Cold War turn toward liberal internationalism within

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a unipolar order. While continental and regional institutions such as the OAU, AU, and Regional Economic Communities advanced important normative frameworks, they remained constrained by sovereignty-centred regionalism and methodological nationalism. These constraints have produced a persistent gap between popular Pan-African aspirations and their institutional realization.

Africa in a Changing Capitalist Order

A comprehensive account of Africa's position in the global order begins from the Du Boisian premise that the domestic and international are historically inseparable (Getachew and Pitts 2022, xvii). Empire and democracy are co-constituted through racial hierarchy, or what Du Bois termed the global "colour line" (Getachew and Pitts 2022, xvi). From this perspective, Africa is not peripheral but constitutive of modern international order, its subjugation embedded in the contradictions of global modernity. Du Bois's claim that "to save the world, save Africa" (Du Bois 1949, 255) captures this entanglement. Read alongside Samir Amin, Du Bois's racial diagnosis is extended into a critique of global political economy, where racial hierarchy and center-periphery relations produce a unified system of uneven development (Amin 1977). Africa is thus constructed as structurally underdeveloped within capitalism rather than merely lagging development.

In Mahmood Mamdani's account, this "colour line" is institutionalized as a cultural line of colonial rule – a governing logic that organized difference through indirect rule. By producing citizens in the urban sphere and ethnicized subjects in the rural sphere, colonial governance embedded a durable cultural-political hierarchy within the state form itself (Mamdani 2020). This cultural line persists into the postcolonial order, shaping the structure of authority, citizenship, and belonging, and generating enduring tensions around nation-building and political inclusion (Mamdani 2018; 2020). Despite its emancipatory promise, nationalism often produces exclusionary citizenship regimes that intensify ethnicization, xenophobia, and violent conflict (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012). Across different sub regional contexts, fragile institutions oscillate between militarization, insurgency, and electoral volatility (Idrissa 2021; Niang 2014; Tariku and Gebresenbet 2025).

While empirical contexts differ, they share a structural pattern rooted in colonial state formation and uneven incorporation into the international system (Mamdani 2018; Grovogui 2002). Slavery, colonial conquest, and racial capitalism were constitutive of the modern international system (Du Bois 2007; Amin 1977). The universal language of civilization, democracy, and peace has historically been grounded in imperial violence and racial hierarchy, a contradiction that persists through liberal internationalism, Cold War geopolitics, and the post-9/11 global order (Cheru 2009; Mampilly 2022).

In the contemporary period, Africa remains a site of geopolitical competition over resources, security, and strategic influence (Grovogui 2002, 9–11). Du Bois's *The African*

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Roots of War (1915) remains relevant in showing how colonial rivalry over Africa generated structural conditions for global conflict. Africa's subordination therefore continues to be linked to instability in the wider international order.

Within this framework, the postcolonial African state emerges as Janus-faced, meaning it possesses two conflicting orientations: one inward toward domestic contradictions and colonial legacies, the other outward toward racial and hierarchical global power. Internally, it reflects unresolved tensions between state and society shaped by colonial governance (Mamdani 2018); externally, it remains constrained by hierarchical sovereignty in the global system (Amin 1977). The contemporary African state thus embodies a dual condition as both product and agent of global capitalism and imperial history.

At the core of these struggles lies a dual imperative: confronting the internal "culture line" through decolonization of political community (Mamdani 2020), and challenging the external "colour line" through restructuring the global political economy (Amin 1977). These are mutually constitutive dimensions of African political life rather than separate agendas, and a threshold for collective continental ascent.

Yet Africa has never been a passive object of these structures. In each problem dimension a historically contingent ensemble of questions and political imaginaries has been actively inhabited and refashioned by African actors (David Scott 1999 and 2004). From Pan-Africanism to the NIEO to anti-apartheid internationalism, Africa did not simply respond to external constraints; it helped refashion the questions themselves, shifting problem spaces as earlier certainties of liberation gave way to new struggles over debt, democracy, and epistemic authority. As Caromba (2022, 2025) notes, African actors have consistently shaped international politics even under constraint. Anti-colonial struggles disrupted imperial legitimacy and generated alternative visions of world order. Pan-Africanism, the Bandung Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement, the New International Economic Order (NIEO), and anti-apartheid internationalism articulated projects aimed not merely at inclusion, but at a systemic restructuring of the global political and economic order. (Mazrui 1977; Amin 1977; Getachew 2022). These initiatives constitute "world-making after empire" (Getachew 2022), linking decolonization to redistribution, sovereignty, and collective autonomy.

Across colonial multipolar order, Cold War bipolarity, liberal unipolarity, and contemporary multipolar configurations, Africa has remained central to the making of global order rather than external to it (Caromba 2022). Emancipatory politics have, therefore, operated across domestic and international dimensions, challenging authoritarian governance and external structural adjustment regimes (Branch and Mampilly 2015), pursuing alternative developmental transformation (Mkandawire 2001) as counter-hegemonic struggles over global political economy.

National (domestic) and international engagement with the postcolonial state, remain co-constitutive sites of struggle. This dynamic and the national and international

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dialectical enablement underscores the relevance of continental coordination through external and internal facing continental institutions such as the African Union as potential platforms for collective transformation. The AU hitherto appears a critical actor mainly for redemptive politics that transcend the limits of the African state and the international order. Any analysis of AU-level action must therefore situate Africa within global relations, showing how international structures reproduce domestic contradictions, uneven development, and peripheralization across historical time from the colonial period to the present.

***Pax Africana*: From Colonial Multipolarity to Cold War Bipolarity**

The possibility of *Pax Africana* and its challenges have historical precedent. Africa was integrated into the modern world order through colonial conquest, violent rule, and the production of underdevelopment as a continuation of slavery. The Berlin Conference (1884–1885) formalized European partition, while colonial rule reorganized African societies through indirect administration, taxation, and coercive labor regimes for imperial accumulation. Infrastructure and production were reoriented outward, producing underdevelopment as a structural condition rather than a transitional stage. Colonial borders further fragmented pre-existing political and cultural formations, embedding instability within the architecture of the modern African state (Amin 1977; Mamdani 1996).

Yet colonial domination was never total. Africans resisted imperial conquest and rule through military, political, and everyday forms of struggle. Armed resistance included the Zulu defenses in southern Africa, Ashanti wars against Britain, Mahdist uprising in Sudan, and Ethiopia's victory over Italy at the Battle of Adwa (1896). Political resistance emerged through organizations and political movements linking anti-colonial struggles across Africa and the diaspora around self-determination and racial equality (Du Bois 2007). Everyday resistance further undermined colonial authority. As Fanon (1961) shows, colonial domination was dehumanising and generated resistance rooted in the everyday, spontaneous struggle for colonized dignity.

These struggles were also understood as part of a global project of peace that is unthinkable without political justice. Du Bois articulated Africa's centrality to world order, writing: "We can, if we will, inaugurate on the dark continent a last great crusade for humanity. With Africa redeemed, Asia would be safe and Europe indeed triumphant" (Du Bois 2007, 6). Africa's liberation was thus imagined as foundational to global peace and security.

Decolonization culminated in African independence, beginning with Ghana in 1957. Independence marked the universalization of the nation-state as self-determination and a major victory against colonial rule (Getachew 2022). Anti-colonialism was also a

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project of worldmaking aimed at transforming global hierarchy. These emancipatory projects operated at two levels: domestically through development and democratic transformation, and internationally through dismantling the global “color line” structuring world politics (Getachew 2022, 13).

This aspiration for African agency, peace and security was later articulated in Ali Mazrui’s concept of *Pax Africana*. In *Towards a Pax Africana*, Africans must become “their own policemen,” taking responsibility for continental peace and security (Mazrui 1967). Sovereignty is thus redefined as both political agency and security responsibility. For Mazrui, however, decolonization alone is insufficient: “the painful search for a *pax africana* therefore continues”. Similar to Getachew’s argument of national independence as insufficient for decolonization, decolonization might be a necessary condition for [*Pax Africana*]. But it is far from being a sufficient one” (Mazrui 1967, 211).

Pax Africana thus operates through both intersubjective relations among African states and Africa’s positioning within international politics, through which external powers respond to the continent. *Pax Africana* works in two ways. First, through how African states relate to each other, and, secondly, through how the rest of the world sees and reacts to Africa. Intra-African peace is both an end and a means of preventing external intervention, since African political disorder often invites external involvement (Mazrui 1967, 213). Peace among African states is a condition for excluding external intervention, making peace and freedom mutually reinforcing as “peace between Africans and freedom for Africa are... intimately related” (Mazrui 1967, 213).

The Cold War as another problem space did not fundamentally alter the structures of the international system so much as reconfigure them. Bipolarity between the United States and the Soviet Union transformed Africa into a key site of geopolitical competition. Decolonization coincided with intensified external intervention, shaping regime formation, military alignments, and patterns of economic dependency. Africa was therefore constitutive of the Cold War order rather than external to it. Within this context, the question of how Africa should conduct itself in international politics became increasingly urgent, making a coordinated continental foreign policy orientation imperative. Non-alignment - defined as a foreign policy orientation and posture of refusing formal military alliances with either Cold War superpower while retaining active participation in global affairs, consequently emerged as a creative and strategic response aimed at preserving African autonomy within Cold War bipolarity while limiting incorporation into rival external blocs (Mazrui 1977, 214).

In the immediate aftermath of independence, the Janus-faced postcolonial state operated both inwardly, confronting fragmented authority, and outwardly, constrained by the international order. Domestic fragmentation and global dependency thus became defining features of African statehood. Domestically, it faced “decentralised despotism” or a bifurcated colonial state Mamdani (2018, xx). Postcolonial regimes either preserved customary authority and ethnic divisions or imposed uniform legal systems, often replicating colonial despotism. As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the

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pitfalls of national consciousness left the postcolonial state fragile and unable to transform the social order, resulting in weak participatory institutions that deepened external dependency and arrested development (Fanon 1961; Ake 1996; Mkandawire 2001)

African states formally adopted non-alignment while advancing institutional Pan-Africanism through the OAU (Mazrui 1977). Founded in 1963, the OAU reflected compromise between the radical Casablanca and conservative Monrovia blocs, privileging sovereignty and non-interference over supranational authority (Wallerstein 1966; Edo & Olanrewaju 2012). This framework gave Africa a unified anti-colonial voice, but it went unmatched by external action. The OAU mediation commission never heard a case and non-interference became non-engagement (Engel 2019). By the late 1960s, the OAU was externally an anti-colonial bloc yet internally a “club of states” unable to enforce accountability. Non-interference shielded authoritarian rule, blocked democratic possibility, and prevented developmental oversight. As Mamdani (2018) and Ake (1996) argued, the African state neither democratized nor decolonized, arresting its development. It also rendered continental mediation ineffective. Together these failures have arrested *Pax Africana*.

This political dynamic reveals the structural contradiction of *Pax Africana*: effective as diplomatic anti-colonialism but institutionally constrained by sovereignty and authoritarian consolidation. Patterns observable at the national level repeated themselves regionally, with the collective level inadequately reckoning with them in part due to the imperial and colonial continuities. Africa's internal fragility and weak interstate relations enabled proxy wars and interventions from the bipolar world order. The (NIEO) project of transforming international economic relations also failed. These conditions deepened under global economic restructuring and the peripheralization of the African state (Grovogui 2002 and Getachew 2022). Structural adjustment programmes reduced fiscal capacity, fragmented institutions, and replaced planning with donor conditionality, reinforcing external dependency and internal fragility (Mkandawire 2001).

Across colonial and Cold War eras, Africa's position reflects continuity within transformation. Unequal incorporation into capitalism persisted. Yet African traditions – Pan-Africanism, non-alignment, *Pax Africana*, continuously generated alternative global visions. These visions failed at global level because the neo-colonial condition reproduced old hierarchies, and the nation-state maintained by the 1963 compromise – by its very structure, limited the possibility of complete decolonization at the domestic level.

Pax Africana and the Unipolar World Order

The post–Cold War unipolar order operated within a two-directional state. Oriented on domestic control and external recognition, reproducing a Du Boisian paradox in which

the domestic and international remained inseparable, while democratic form masked imperial substance. Liberal multilateralism, market reform, democratization discourse, humanitarian intervention, and donor conditionality reconfigured rather than removed external domination. Structural adjustment and governance conditionality deepened dependency while weakening state capacity and social provision (Cheru 2009, Mampilly 2022). The African states, thus, remained internally fragmented and externally constrained within a liberal-capitalist unipolar order.

Internally, many African states embraced liberal electoral democracy as a response to the post-Cold War reordering, but without fundamentally altering the structural conditions that undermined both democracy and development. Elections frequently outpaced social transformation and institutional consolidation, while ethnic politicization, elite capture, and external policy influence persisted (Mamdani 2018; Ake 1996; Mkandawire 2001). For example, when liberal electoral democracy relatively succeeds - as Ossome demonstrates in the Kenyan case, electoral transitions reproduce colonial gendered violence and elite capture beneath a democratic mask (Ossome 2018). As Mkandawire (1999) argues, many elected governments in Africa operate as "choiceless democracies," where structural adjustment and external conditionalities leave them looking identical and unable to change fundamental economic realities. Ake (1993, 2000) further shows how autocrats have cleverly co-opted elections to maintain elite rule, speaking the language of democracy while subverting its promise. When it fails, as Idrissa (2022–2023) shows for the Sahel, elections become empty ritual, donors certify the façade, and popular anger invites military coups against a system with no substance left. Procedural democracy coexisted with fragile welfare systems, securitized governance, and limited political autonomy, producing a domestic manifestation of the Du Boisian inversion in which democratic legitimacy increasingly served external donors and ruling elites rather than citizens.

Within the post-Cold War order, OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim acknowledged the OAU's anti-colonial achievements but criticized its failure to address internal conflicts and economic decline. He argued that non-interference "*should not be construed to mean or used to justify indifference*" (OAU 1990, ii), calling for mediation reform and collective self-reliance while warning that Western donors were tying aid to democratization. In the emerging *Pan Africana*, peace became the foundation for development, with African conflicts resolved primarily through African institutions rather than external intervention.

Yet the project remained contradictory. As Bing (1991) argued, Salim's vision relied excessively on the "international community" despite the global inequalities it produced. Tensions between sovereignty, democracy, and intervention persisted, and liberal reforms risked reproducing externally aligned elite orders. *Pax Africana* thus reflected a postcolonial contradiction: autonomy entangled with dependency.

In 2002, these tensions precipitated the reconstitution of the OAU into the African Union (AU). The AU represented an important normative rupture with the sovereignty-centred

regionalism of the OAU by replacing non-interference with the principle of non-indifference. Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act authorized intervention in cases of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, signalling a shift from regime security toward human security (Mathews 2005, 149). Similarly, the newly established African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the Peace and Security Council (PSC) institutionalized a more interventionist and collective continental approach to security (Nagar and Nganje 2016, 4). These reforms reflected an important evolution within Pan-African thought: peace and sovereignty could no longer be separated from democratic governance, atrocity prevention, and regional responsibility in this new *Pax Africana*. However, this transition was not a popular or intellectually grounded pan-Africanist revival. Instead, it was a technocratic, problem-solving exercise that embraced the triumph of liberal internationalism and globalization, crafted by legal experts and diplomats to align African governance with post-Cold War norms of conditional sovereignty and market-friendly regional integration.

The AU itself became a Janus-faced institution. Internally, it projected continental unity, African solutions, and normative autonomy. Externally, it remained heavily dependent on donors, external funding, and global security partnerships. As Edozie and Gottschalk (2014, 196) note, the overwhelming majority of AU development and peace initiatives continued to rely on external financing, undermining the Union's operational autonomy. Likewise, tensions between the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the eight sub-regional bodies meant to serve as the AU's building blocks operated in parallel and with overlapping memberships, leading to institutional fragmentation, uneven implementation, and weakened continental coherence (Nagar and Nganje 2016, 6). As Demisse observes in the case of the East African Community (EAC), overlapping memberships with other RECs such as SADC, COMESA, and IGAD remained a primary source of integration challenges.

Moreover, member states' narrow nationalism and focus on regime survival persistently compromised regional agendas (Demisse 2024, 3–4). Although the AU introduced important normative innovations, sovereignty-centred regionalism inherited from the OAU persisted. Continuing authoritarian governance, selective intervention, and donor dependency at the state level revealed the limits of continental transformation within the unipolar world order. The gap between normative aspiration and operational autonomy remained wide. One clear manifestation is the AU's near-blind approval of hollow elections alongside its routine condemnation of popular coups, rewarding democratic form while punishing rupture against elite capture.

From Casablanca Group's radical Pan-Africanism to Addis Ababa's sovereignty-centred OAU, and from Bandung's non-aligned aspirations to the AU's doctrine of non-indifference, African international thought has oscillated between emancipatory worldmaking and structural peripheralization. The AU's post-Cold War *Pax Africana* marked the most significant continental aspiration to transcend the contradictions of the Janus-faced postcolonial state through collective security, democratic governance, and African-led conflict resolution.

Yet each of these historical discourses inscribed its own limits: Casablanca Group's radicalism lacked institutional reach, the OAU's sovereignty norm enabled state-centric inertia, and Bandung's non-alignment proved vulnerable to global power shifts. Consequently, the AU's operational autonomy today is not simply an implementation challenge but a structural and political question—embedded in the domestic contradiction between state and society, and Africa's subordinate position within the global order, extending beyond institutional capacity into struggles over authority, sovereignty, and knowledge. It is clear that, while African unity is often framed as strategic and existential, it cannot be realized without the decolonization and democratization of the political community. The new *Pax Africana* thus emerges not as emancipation rooted in popular and intellectual currents, but as a partial attempt to secure continental autonomy within a hierarchical global system and colonial legacies.

Rethinking *Pax Africana* in the Multipolar World Order

This paper has argued that Africa's contemporary insecurity reflects the intersection of two historically constituted crises: the unresolved contradictions of the state and the capitalist and racial world dis/order. By returning genealogically to *Pax Africana*, the paper has shown that African security was originally conceived not merely as a doctrine of conflict management but as a broader Pan-African project constitutive of the re-making of Africa and worldmaking. Revisiting this intellectual tradition demonstrates that African security has always been inseparable from struggles over the reorganization of the state and the organization of international order itself. The current multipolar moment therefore reopens rather than resolves these longstanding questions of *Pax Africana*.

Internally, insecurity is rooted in the unresolved domestic crisis of the African state. Colonial bifurcations sustain politicized ethnicity, unequal citizenship, weak democratic legitimacy, and fragmented political communities—producing “state-nations” rather than homogeneous nation-states amid Africa's multi-ethnic and broader global demographic shifts (Mamdani 2018 and Hyden 2024). The persistence and politicisation of the “culture line” reproduces internal insecurity through institutionalized exclusion, authoritarianism, and contested nationhood and citizenship (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012; Mamdani 2018). Concurrently, structural adjustment and the retreat of the developmental state have exacerbated social contradictions and weakened welfare systems, rendering Africa's global economic dependency central to its underdevelopment (Ake 1996).

The current global capitalist crisis and multipolarity thus do not automatically yield liberation. The historical arc—from colonial multipolarity, through Cold War bipolarity and post-Cold War unipolarity, to today's fragmented multipolarity—exposes a persistent contradiction: the Janus-faced postcolonial state, shaped internally by the “culture line” and externally by the “colour line” of global capitalism. These dimensions are mutually

reinforcing. Internally, fragmentation is perpetuated via patronage, fragmented political community and weak democratic accountability—precisely the bifurcated rule (citizen/subject and urban/rural divides) (Mamdani 2018; 2020). The postcolonial state thus emerged neither as a fully integrated national community nor as an autonomous actor in world politics.

Externally, it is embedded in unequal structures of dependency, debt, security partnerships, intervention, and racially hierarchical sovereignty (Grovogui 2002 Iwuoha and Doeverspeck 2025). Du Bois's "colour line" continues to shape Africa's subordinate incorporation into global capitalism, even as the actors and mechanisms of domination evolve. The decline of the post-Cold War unipolar order has not produced a more equitable international system but a fragmented multipolarity marked by geopolitical rivalry, selective multilateralism, transactional diplomacy, and technological competition. Multipolarity therefore reconfigures rather than dismantles global hierarchy.

Within this evolving order, Africa has become a central arena of competition over agricultural lands, critical minerals, maritime routes and ports, digital infrastructure, and security partnerships. While the global multipolarity creates opportunities to diversify external relations beyond traditional Western dependence, it also intensifies debt dependency, militarization and proxy conflicts, digital extraction, and competing military and economic engagements. Rival alignments—such as Kenya's U.S. Major Non-NATO Ally partnership and Ethiopia's BRICS membership—illustrate how external competition increasingly fragments Africa's diplomatic space without fundamentally altering its peripheral position within the global economy. These external pressures reinforce domestic political fragmentation. The militarization of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, together with continuing interventions by global and regional powers, intersect with internal crises of statehood in countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa. Despite differing constitutional arrangements, these states continue to struggle with managing deep social and political cleavages. Africa's contemporary insecurity therefore emerges not from domestic or international dynamics alone, but from their mutually reinforcing interaction within an evolving yet persistently unequal global capitalist order. The postcolonial state remains simultaneously the site where global hierarchies are reproduced and where alternative futures may be constructed.

These developments reveal a recurring historical pattern: *Pax Africana* has always been shaped by transformations in world politics, even as African actors have sought to reshape those conditions through collective solidarity, strategic autonomy, institution-building, and reform. Contemporary fragmented multipolarity presents both opportunities and constraints. While African states can diversify partnerships, hedge among competing powers, and gain greater diplomatic leverage, enduring global hierarchies continue to deepen external penetration through debt, militarization, proxy competition, and geopolitical rivalry. As unilateral tactics and bilateral engagements increasingly outpace continental coordination, the African Union has struggled to articulate a coherent collective foreign policy. The challenge, therefore, is whether Africa

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can revive *Pax Africana* through renewed continental strategy before these structural pressures further fragment the postcolonial state and undermine collective security.

This moment echoes earlier struggles for Africa's agency in world order but in different problem spaces. At the 1900 Pan-African Conference in London, Du Bois exposed how racial hierarchy structured international order, extending the Pan-African critique beyond national independence toward reconstruction of world order. Three decades later, Kwame Nkrumah argued that Ghana's independence would remain incomplete without the liberation and political unity of the entire continent, advocating a United States of Africa and an African High Command capable of resisting neo-colonial intervention (Getachew 2022). Ali A. Mazrui (1967) later theorized these aspirations as *Pax Africana*, opposing it to *Pax Britannica* and grounding it both in the intra-African condition and Africa's place within world order.

A renewed *Pax Africana* therefore requires more than strengthening existing continental institutions or expanding peacekeeping capacities. It calls for a transformative Pan-African strategy that works simultaneously on both the internal and external dimensions of the postcolonial state. Hence the global capitalist crisis creates a new terrain of struggle in which Africa may pursue alternative developments, and autonomy only through organized, counter-hegemonic, and collective political agency rooted both in continental coordination and in broader grassroots intellectual and political movements.

Internally, this requires reconstructing political communities beyond colonial bifurcations by deepening democratic citizenship, strengthening accountable institutions, challenging methodological nation statism and fostering more inclusive forms of political participation that transcend politicized ethnicity and patronage at local and national level.

Externally, it demands greater continental strategic autonomy through stronger African Union coordination in diplomacy, peace and security, and conflict mediation, while reducing dependence on external military and financial actors. The contemporary multipolar world will remain capitalist, yet it contains contradictions that may create strategic openings for Africa and the Global South to tackle more transformative approaches. Inter-imperialist rivalry, the legitimacy crisis of Bretton Woods institutions, China's contradictory role as both extractor and development partner, and the rising costs of technological dependence all create spaces that African actors may attempt to leverage by a renewed engagement with Ali A. Mazrui's vision of *Pax Africana* such autonomy must also extend to the economic and technological domains by advancing African-led financial institutions, debt justice, regional economic integration through initiatives such as the AfCFTA and PAPSS, and greater digital sovereignty to resist new forms of technological dependency and data extraction.

Critics may argue that the AU remains a ready-made institutional framework inherited from the optimism of the unipolar liberal international order. Yet the current

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reconfiguration of world order presents an opportunity to reassess the global structures within which Africa operates - structures historically organized to secure global stability at Africa's expense. The transformation of international order parallel with the reinvention of African states must therefore become a central objective of the AU, as a matter of urgent historical necessity. Ultimately, however, these institutional reforms can only succeed if accompanied by a revival of the broader Pan-African political and intellectual project envisioned by pan Africanists including Du Bois, Nkrumah, and Mazrui—one that reconnects continental governance with popular democratic movements, critical scholarship, and collective political agency capable of reshaping both the African state and the unequal international order within which it remains embedded.

A fragmented multipolar world brings instability, yet it also opens space to reimagine *Pax Africana*, autonomy, solidarity, and a just global order. Such reimagination requires simultaneous democratization within Africa and structural change of the unequal global hierarchies that marginalize the continent. Only then can the African Union move beyond technocratic rule and revive the popular, intellectual Pan-African traditions that inspired its founding – and question the present hierarchical political establishment, as best exemplified by Gen Z protests and the wider decolonization intellectual movements.

Ultimately, the significance of *Pax Africana* lies not simply in proposing African solutions to African problems, but in recovering a Pan-African tradition that understood security as inseparable from the transformation of world order. Colonial multipolarity, Cold War bipolarity, liberal unipolarity, and today's fragmented multipolarity each generated different configurations of hierarchy, yet all reproduced Africa's subordinate incorporation into global capitalism. The present conjuncture nevertheless creates new political openings. Whether these produce renewed dependency or greater autonomy will depend less on shifts in the global balance of power than on Africa's capacity for democratic reconstruction, continental coordination, and collective political action. The unfinished project is therefore not only state building but worldmaking itself. Renewing *Pax Africana* requires transforming both the internal structures of the postcolonial state and the unequal international order within which it remains embedded. Only then can Africa move from being an object of global geopolitics to becoming an active author of a more just and genuinely multipolar world order.

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