African Citizenship and the African Union's Vision of Africanity in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

The main objective of the African Union (hereafter referred to as the AU) in the twenty-first century is influenced by the ideology of Africanity, a sense of recognition of Africa's "Africanness". This main objective, which includes creating an African-citizenship-based continent by the year 2063, is considered a means of achieving a prosperous and united African continent. The rationale for African citizenship is to establish a situation in which all Africans have comparable rights and privileges across all AU member states. Meanwhile, member states' rigid adherence to sovereignty prevents the continent from achieving its goal of shared citizenship. Non-citizens are denied the privileges and rights of citizenship under the various national laws that define who a citizen is. The study thus seeks to examine the AU's role in establishing a common African citizenship and the impact of such roles on achieving Africanness in the twenty-first century, considering the challenge of creating a common African citizenship. The study will use textual analysis of secondary data to achieve this goal.

Keywords: African Union, Africanity, Citizenship, Africanness, African integration.

Introduction

European colonial powers established the present borders of African states, which continue to affect post-colonial Africa. The legacies of colonialism, including boundaries and identity, significantly shape the current relationships between African states and their citizens. The Berlin Conference, held in 1884-1885, served as a pivotal precursor to colonial enterprises in Africa, delineating territorial boundaries that have persisted into the post-independence era. Consequently, various issues have arisen from this colonial heritage, including conflicts like the Nigeria-Cameroon border dispute and the Rwandan genocide, which highlight the adverse effects of colonial structures in Africa. Scholars argue that post-colonial African states struggle to achieve development because they were formed by imperialist powers primarily for exploitation (Young, 1994; Mutua, 1995; Mamdani, 1996; Ake, 1996; Englebert, 2000). The infrastructure established by the colonial administration was primarily oriented towards facilitating the transportation of raw materials from the interior regions to the seaports for export to European markets. These colonial structures were inherently exploitative, designed to serve the economic interests of the colonisers at the

expense of the colonies themselves.

In this context, it is argued that post-colonial African states must undergo reconfiguration to foster the continent's development. Mutua (1995) contends that the current post-colonial African states are not viable for sustainable progress and advocates for the establishment of a federated fourteen new states to replace the existing ones. His argument rests on the premise that African states need to relax their rigidity on sovereignty to form a unified entity that promotes collective development. Prior to his proposition, the independent African states had established the Organisation of African Unity in 1965 to solve the existential threats posed by the lingering effects of colonialism on post-colonial states. The foundation of the OAU was rooted in Pan-Africanist ideology, which sought to encourage cooperation among independent African states. Pan-Africanist ideology emerged from the New World, intending to foster solidarity among individuals of African descent in the face of various forms of oppression. This movement seeks to unify the global black diaspora in their collective struggle against systemic injustices and inequalities.

The establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was primarily aimed at providing a platform for African independent states to collaborate and address their collective challenges. However, the OAU's inability to resolve conflicts and foster development on the continent ultimately led to its replacement by the African Union (AU) in 2002. The AU was created to enhance the continent's development by unifying its member states. It has implemented various policies, agendas, and initiatives through its different organs to achieve its objectives. The "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" is among its key frameworks, adopted in June 2015. This document serves as a shared strategic blueprint for inclusive growth and sustainable development, aiming to optimise the utilisation of Africa's resources for the benefit of all Africans (African Union Commission, 2015).

Central to the Agenda 2063 is the idea of Africanity, which has been a driving force behind the establishment of the OAU and the AU. African unity is adopted to represent the thoughts and ways of uniting the states on the continent. The consciousness of oneness is critical to the AU idea in the 21st century. Consequently, the AU has devised means to facilitate the free movement of goods and people throughout the continent, to create a united African continent. For instance, the introduction of the African Continental Free Trade Area is aimed at

> create a single market for goods and services, facilitated by
> the movement of persons, in order to deepen the economic

integration of the African continent and under the Pan African Vision of "An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa" enshrined in Agenda 2063.

In pursuit of this aim, the African Union (AU) implemented various strategic actions and policies. The implementation of these strategies adopts a bottom-up approach, thereby initiating the integration process at the level of the eight Regional Economic Commissions (RECs). This methodology underscores the importance of engaging local stakeholders and institutions early in the integration process to ensure that the unique contexts and needs of each region are adequately addressed. These efforts aim to foster a sense of African citizenship within these RECs. The eight recognised RECs are to serve as points of initiating the integration process by creating free movement of people and goods within their respective sub-regions. However, despite the AU's initiatives, a strong sense of Africanness appears to be lacking among many Africans.

The prevailing issues of xenophobia and the strict adherence to national sovereignty by states continue to impede the realisation of African citizenship within the AU, leading to the notion of "*Us vs Them*". The *Us* versus *Them* sense, fuelled by national interest, influences citizens' behaviour and the making of nationality laws in states on the continent. Citizenship laws in African states are instruments of the state that define who is a member and who is qualified to be a member. The disparities and complexity in citizenship laws across the African continent indicate the challenges bedevilling the AU's goal of attaining a continent of shared identity by 2063.

 Accordingly, this study explores the concept of citizenship in the African Union's goal of creating a united African continent. Using secondary data, it argues that although Agenda 2063 does not openly aim to establish a continental citizenship, its second and fifth aspirations—focused on promoting a shared identity across Africa—implicitly imply such a goal. The study also maintains that the diverse and complex nature of citizenship laws across African countries creates a significant barrier to achieving this vision of the AU.

Citizenship: Understanding the Concept

Citizenship is a concept that has been examined through the lenses of law, sociology, and political science. Each discipline approaches citizenship to affirm an individual's recognition and status within a state. Consequently,

literature has explored citizenship from both individualistic and relational perspectives (Young, 1989; Ong, 1999; Delanty, 2000; Isin &Bryan, 2002; Lister, 2007; Parekh, 2008; Bellamy, 2008). The individualistic perspective delves into themes of status, identity, and rights (Schuck, 1989; Spinner-Halev, 1994; Etzioni, 1995). In contrast, the relational perspective views citizenship as the individual's role within the state and the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the state (Delanty, 2000; Isin & Bryan, 2002; Lister, 2007; Parekh, 2008; Bellamy, 2008). Together, these two perspectives provide a foundation for conceptualising citizenship.

Marshall (1963) identified three stages of the history of the concept of citizenship while analysing the inherent relationship between citizenship and migration. According to him, citizenship evolved from civil citizenship—the rights necessary for individual freedom: liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought, and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice. Marshall's (1963) explanation of civil citizenship considers the concept from the individualistic analytical perspective. Marshal's emphasis on freedom and rights enjoyed by individuals constitutes the definition of citizenship status.

On the other hand, political citizenship emerged in the 19th century to mean the right to exercise political power. Marshall (1963) conceptualised political citizenship as either a member of a body invested in political authority or an elector of its members. Citizenship, here, is defined as the right of individuals to participate in the political activities of the state. Political citizenship is conceptualised from a relational analytical perspective. Participation in the political system of a particular state defines who is a citizen of such a state.

Marshall (1963) identified social citizenship as the last stage of the history of citizenship. This stage, which dominated the 20th century, focuses on the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share in the full social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society. This historical analysis of the trajectory of the concept of citizenship indicates the continuous shifting of its conceptual boundaries. According to Marshall (1963), citizenship is a civil, political and social phenomenon with multifaceted definitions.

For Heater (1999), citizenship can be analysed through three frameworks: state recognition of membership, the relationship between nationality and citizenship, and the methods by which citizenship is defined. Membership recognition explains citizenship as the legal recognition by a state of an individual as a member of that state. This individualistic analysis of citizenship is built on the idea that the state recognises membership. The

nationality and citizenship dichotomy considers citizenship from political discourse. On methods, Heater (1999) identifies two: *Jus Sanguinis* – citizenship by descent- and *Jus Soli* – citizenship by state territory. Heater's (1999) analytical framework suggests that citizenship can be viewed as being based on legal recognition, nationality, and the process of its acquisition.

Tilly (1995) argues that citizenship can be referred to as a "category," the "role", and "identity." He explains citizenship as a category that denotes a set of actors distinguished by their shared privileged position *vis-à-vis* a particular state. Tilly (1995) explains that citizenship identifies an enforceable mutual relation between an actor and state agents. Citizenship as a role is explained by Tilly (1995) to mean all of an actor's relations to others that depend on the actor's relation to a particular state. Lastly, for identity, he considers citizenship as the experience and public representation of a category, tie or role. In his approach, Tilly (1995) explains citizenship as a psychological expression of belonging, leading to active participation in the state's civil, political, economic, and social activities. Thus, Tilly (1995) defines citizenship as a continuing series of transaction between person and agents of a given state in which each has enforceable rights and obligations uniquely by (1) the person's membership in an exclusive category, the native-born plus the naturalised and (2) the agent's relation to the state rather than any other authority the agent may enjoy.

Citizenship in the Context of Agenda 2063

The African Union has steadfastly pursued its primary objective of fostering a united African continent since the establishment of the OAU. Central to this mission is creating a United African Front, guided by the Agenda 2063 framework, with the aim of its realisation by 2063. Agenda 2063 serves as a crucial plan of action for the AU, outlining seven key goals to be achieved by the target date. These goals represent a continuation of the pan-African movement that has spanned centuries, emphasising unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity, as advocated by Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance (AU Commission, 2015). The document underscores the importance of collectivism and shared identity among individuals across the continent, focusing on strategies to promote unification and development in Africa throughout the 21st century.

The document outlines seven aspirations to shape the continent's future. Two of these aspirations, specifically Aspirations Two and Five, emphasise the importance of establishing a unified identity for Africa by 2063. Aspiration Two, titled "An integrated continent, politically united based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance,"

envisions the emergence of a united, strong, sovereign, independent, and self-reliant continent that achieves complete economic and political integration (the AU Commission, 2015). This aspiration represents a political initiative aimed at achieving the continent's political unity, ultimately seeking to create a single sovereign state encompassing all existing African nations. Similarly, Aspiration Five, "An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics," focuses on fostering a distinct African cultural identity, along with shared values and ethics, as essential components for Africa's resurgence on the global stage (the AU Commission, 2015). This fifth aspiration seeks a culturally rooted unification of the continent, where African culture plays a pivotal role in global politics.

One of the strategies the African Union (AU) implemented to foster a united continent was the introduction of an ordinary passport for all Africans. Proposed in 2016, the idea of a single passport aims to promote the free movement of people and goods throughout the continent. While the organisation has yet to fully realise this initiative, developing a unified passport represents a significant step toward establishing a sense of African citizenship.

The concept of African citizenship is effectively captured within the AU's various strategic frameworks, including Agenda 2063 and the push for an ordinary passport. Although the explicit formation of African citizenship is not directly articulated in the AU's strategic documents, the underlying actions and objectives suggest that these strategies are oriented toward cultivating a shared sense of identity among African citizens.

Citizenship Laws in Africa

The concept of citizenship in modern Africa has its roots in the colonial era, which significantly shaped notions of identity and belonging. During this period, colonial powers delineated membership according to the boundaries they established, thereby highlighting the territorial dimension of citizenship as understood within the colonial context. The subsequent formation of new states and the imposition of bounded territories resulted in new identities across the continent, diverging from the rich tapestry of ethnic and cultural identities that existed prior to colonialism. These emergent identities, shaped by colonial impositions, largely disregarded the ethnic and cultural affiliations prevalent in Africa, ultimately aligning post-colonial notions of citizenship with Eurocentric paradigms. In this context, these colonial boundaries largely influenced the delineation of citizenship.

In post-colonial Africa, citizenship laws are predominantly informed by the principles of jus soli and jus sanguinis. These two concepts are instrumental in determining citizenship status across various African states. According to

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Manby (2010), *jus soli* refers to the acquisition of citizenship based on an individual's place of birth. Conversely, jus sanguinis denotes a framework wherein citizenship is conferred through descent from parents who are or were citizens of a state (Manby, 2010). This bifocal approach to citizenship originated from colonial and European perspectives on national membership adopted during colonialism in Africa.

As such, citizenship laws throughout the continent are governed by either jus soli or jus sanguinis, or a combination of the two. The specific application of these principles varies by state, with distinct criteria defining citizenship eligibility in each national context. Common factors influencing citizenship laws across African states include race, religion, gender, and naturalisation processes. These variables reflect the complex interplay between historical legacies and contemporary legal frameworks that shape citizenship across Africa's diverse political landscapes.

Race

Race operates as both a social and cultural construct, categorising individuals based on perceived biological and colour differences. It serves as a framework for dividing humans into distinct groups worldwide. Omi and Winant (2014) argue that race functions as both a social and biological system for classifying people. The biological perspective has evolved into one that emphasises social and cultural interactions leading to social selection. In some regions of Africa, race-based classifications play a crucial role in defining citizenship laws. Manby (2010: 3) points out that in at least half a dozen countries on the continent, individuals from certain ethnic groups are effectively barred from obtaining nationality by birth, a restriction that extends to their children and grandchildren. Countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Malawi, and Mali require applicants to demonstrate race or ethnic affiliation to obtain citizenship. According to Manby (2010), both Liberia and Sierra Leone maintain that only those "of Negro descent" are entitled to citizenship from birth. Likewise, Malawi's constitution specifies that citizenship at birth is limited to those with at least one parent who is not only a citizen of Malawi but also "a person of African race." In Egypt, citizenship law similarly prioritises Arab descent over other races in determining citizenship.

Religious Requirement

Religion, defined as the relationship between humanity and the divine, serves as a criterion for acquiring citizenship. Three major religions are predominant in Africa: Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR). According to Kaba (2022: 19), of the 1.3 billion people on the

continent, 657.3 million (51.3%) identify as Christians, 552.7 million (43.1%) as Muslims, and 34.5 million (2.7%) as adherents of African Traditional Religions. This distribution indicates that Christianity and Islam are the principal religions in Africa. As a result, some African nations impose restrictions on citizenship based on religious affiliation.

Religious criteria for citizenship are prevalent in predominantly Islamic North African countries. In this region, the Muslim population is approximately 223 million, compared with 7 million Christians and 1.2 million practitioners of African Traditional Religion (Kaba, 2022). Consequently, nations such as Egypt, Morocco, Libya, and Algeria consider religion an integral requirement for obtaining citizenship. Manby (2010) highlights that several states in North Africa have laws that discriminate on the basis of religious affiliation in the acquisition of citizenship. Notably, the citizenship laws of Egypt, Morocco, and Libya prioritise Islam, placing practitioners of this faith above those of other religions.

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination has significantly influenced the political systems of most African nations since their independence in the 1960s. The issue of gender imbalance, particularly concerning women's rights, remains a central topic in discussions that shape the politics of many African states. These discussions often focus on women's representation and participation in government. However, discrimination against women extends beyond the political and economic realms; it also affects citizenship acquisition for women. According to Manby (2010), many nationality laws in Africa exhibit gender discrimination, depriving women of their rights to pass citizenship to their children and husbands, while men retain the right to bestow their citizenship rights upon their children and wives. Such discriminatory nationality laws exist in several African countries, including Benin, Burundi, Guinea, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, and Togo (Manby, 2010).

While the continent has seen some reforms in this area, Manby (2010) noted that more than two dozen countries either altogether prohibit women from passing their nationality to non-national spouses or impose discriminatory residency requirements on foreign men married to national women seeking nationality. The states identified by Manby (2016) include Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Comoros, the Republic of Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, and Tunisia. This situation suggests that the reforms have not sufficiently addressed the fundamental issue of women's rights to transmit their citizenship. Instead, the reforms primarily enhance

access to nationality for the children of national mothers rather than achieving full equality.

Naturalisation

Citizenship by naturalisation is a common practice in the nationality laws of various African countries. This legal process transforms residency into full membership within a nation. Many national laws delineate the procedures for acquiring citizenship through naturalisation. According to Manby (2016), every African nation, in principle, allows for the attainment of nationality via naturalisation based on long-term residency and the fulfilment of additional requirements. However, the specific laws governing the naturalisation process vary from one state to another across the continent. Each country establishes its own criteria for individuals seeking citizenship under its respective legal framework. Manby (2016) has identified several of these criteria, including duration of residency, cultural connections, language proficiency, and government recommendations.

Citizenship in African Unity: Implications and Challenges

The idea of African citizenship is central to aspirations two and five of the African Union's Agenda 2063. These two aspirations are designed to promote the unification of African states and citizens, fostering a cohesive front across the continent. Aspiration Two advocates for a united Africa that builds dynamic and mutually beneficial relationships with the Diaspora. It underscores an integration process that facilitates the free movement of people, forming the foundation for the AU to establish a common citizenship status for all individuals on the continent. According to the African Union's Agenda 2063 (2015), the political unity of Africa represents the pinnacle of the integration process. This process encompasses the free movement of people and the establishment of continental institutions, ultimately leading to comprehensive economic integration. By 2030, it is expected that a consensus will be reached on the structure of the continental government and its institutions. This vision is to promote a form of political integration that is inclusive of all citizens, allowing individuals to move freely across borders and participate in governance under a continental political framework.

The concept of shared identity is deeply embedded in this second aspiration. Similarly, aspiration five acknowledges the rich diversity of African cultures and peoples; it primarily emphasises the establishment of a shared identity for the continent. This aspiration embraces the cultural diversity of Africans and the continent while emphasising the importance of fostering Pan-Africanism. It aims to establish a shared history, destiny, identity, and

heritage, along with respect for religious diversity and awareness of the aspirations of African people and their diaspora. The foundation of this collective identity is anchored in pan-Africanist ideas and ideology. The strategies will prioritise the promotion of culture, heritage, and a common identity and destiny, thus facilitating a Pan-African approach and contributing to the African Renaissance (AU Agenda 2063, 2015). The two aspirations are strategically aimed at establishing a unified citizenship status across the continent. This concept of citizenship, which emphasises identity and loyalty to the state, is reoriented through these aspirations toward the African Union (AU). It is anticipated that this new identity will foster solidarity among Africans, ultimately paving the way for a singular African citizenship status.

However, the discrepancies in restrictive laws governing citizenship acquisition across African countries present a significant barrier to achieving unified citizenship status. The continent continues to face challenges related to discrimination embedded in citizenship laws, which often hinge on factors such as race, religion, and naturalisation processes. These restrictions complicate efforts to create a singular citizenship status. Manby (2010) notes that citizenship acquisition laws in Africa are exceedingly stringent, rendering the pathways to citizenship impractical. Manby (2016) highlights that there are relatively few cases of citizenship acquisition in comparison to the high volume of applications across the continent. This discrepancy is attributed not only to legal factors but, more significantly, to practical considerations: the procedures involved are often laden with bureaucratic requirements and lengthy processing times. For example, in South Africa, the naturalisation process requires applicants to submit their applications to the mayor of their municipality. The mayor then forwards the application to the *Direction d'administration du territoire* for a moral character inquiry. Following this, the dossier is sent to the Ministry of Justice for verification before ultimately being considered and approved by the presidency (Manby, 2016). This lengthy process influenced procedures across the continent. If these processes are indeed unfeasible, the realisation of a united African citizenship—an aspiration articulated in both the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights—risks being undermined by the various barriers surrounding citizenship acquisition throughout the continent.

The rise in xenophobic attacks across the continent poses a significant challenge to realising the vision of African unity outlined in Agenda 2063. These assaults, perpetrated by some Africans against their fellow Africans, reveal a troubling discrimination rooted in xenophobia. Individuals are targeted based on their national origin or association with another African

nation and are often labelled as "aliens." As Akinlabi (2022) observes, this creates a vicious cycle in which resentment and stereotypes at the individual level are perpetuated, with each nationality subjected to derogatory representations often linked to the issues faced by host African states. This bias is primarily defined by a sense of territorial identity, a construct rooted in colonial perspectives on citizenship. The resulting divide between citizens and non-citizens negatively affects the African Union's efforts to foster a sense of African citizenship.

The challenges faced by the African Union (AU) substantially hinder its mission to foster continental integration and establish a unified African citizenship. The objectives delineated in Agenda 2063 appear to be threatened by diverse citizenship acquisition laws and the actions of individuals across the continent. Despite the AU's emphasis on the importance of unrestricted movement of persons and goods as a fundamental strategy for achieving its objectives, the emergence of xenophobic attitudes across Africa is a concerning trend. Furthermore, the anticipated implementation of an e-passport has yet to materialise, despite the initial target date of 2016. These challenges markedly obstruct the African Union's (AU) efforts towards continental integration and the realisation of common African citizenship. The goals articulated in Agenda 2063 seem to be compromised by the varying citizenship acquisition laws and actions adopted by citizens throughout the continent. Although the AU underscores the critical nature of free movement for individuals and goods as a pivotal strategy in actualising its aspirations, the escalating xenophobic sentiments across Africa signify a troubling trend. Additionally, the expected rollout of an e-passport has not yet occurred, despite the original target date of 2016 being missed.

Conclusion

This study asserts the African Union's (AU) pivotal strategies for uniting the continent in the 21st century. It thoroughly examines the concept of citizenship delineated in the AU Agenda 2063, a strategic framework that embodies the AU's aspirations. While the notion of African citizenship is not explicitly articulated, Aspirations Two and Five compellingly indicate a robust movement toward establishing a shared African identity and unity. This fosters an understanding of citizenship rooted in identity and recognition. Despite the ambiguous treatment of citizenship in the AU Agenda 2063, this analysis unequivocally argues that the AU's aspiration for a united Africa strongly calls for African citizenship.

Moreover, this study champions the AU's initiatives promoting the free

movement of people and goods across the continent, alongside the introduction of the AU Passport, as key mechanisms that enhance the sense of African citizenship. The objectives articulated in Aspirations Two and Five of Agenda 2063 reflect the AU's unwavering commitment to establishing a common citizenship status for the continent. However, these ambitious plans, envisioned for realisation by 2063, confront formidable challenges, including xenophobia and the inconsistencies in citizenship acquisition laws prevalent across Africa. Such discrepancies significantly obstruct and complicate the pursuit of citizenship across the continent. Additionally, discriminatory requirements persist as critical barriers to establishing a cohesive citizenship acquisition framework across Africa. In conclusion, this study firmly contends that pervasive xenophobic attitudes and the disparity in citizenship acquisition laws across the continent critically undermine the AU's efforts to forge a unified African citizenship.

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