IMPACT OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY (OAU), 1963-2002

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines how external forces shaped the development, performance, and eventual transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) from 1963 to 2002. It explores the impact of Cold War rivalry, foreign economic pressures, international institutions, and global political expectations on the OAU's diplomatic choices and structural limitations. The study argues that although the OAU was established to protect African sovereignty and unity, it nevertheless operated in ways that reflected the influence of global power rivalries, donor conditions, and shifting international norms. By analyzing themes such as Cold War alignments, economic dependence, regional conflicts, non-alignment, and the transition to the African Union (AU), the study highlights the tension between Africa's pursuit of collective autonomy and the external constraints that shaped continental politics. It concludes that these external pressures contributed to both the weaknesses of the OAU and the drive for institutional renewal that produced the AU in 2002.
Keywords: OAU, African Union, Cold War, External Influence, Pan-Africanism, Non-alignment, Development Policy, Africa

Introduction
The Organization of African Unity (OAU) emerged in 1963 as the institutional expression of Africa's desire for unity and independence. The organization did not develop in isolation, its formation and evolution occurred within a global system that shaped the choices African leaders could make. The period after the Second World War marked the beginning of global decolonization and the start of the Cold War, and these two developments shaped African diplomacy in profound ways. The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress renewed calls for unity and independence, while the creation of the United Nations provided a platform through which African demands for self-rule entered international debate (Adi, 2003; Mazrui, 1977).

As African states gained independence, they entered the international system during one of its most polarized eras. Many leaders wanted to assert independence in foreign policy, yet the realities of global power politics imposed limits (Westad, 2005). To understand the OAU's performance, it is necessary to acknowledge that the organization operated in a world structured by two superpowers, unequal economic relationships, and global expectations about governance, development, and security (Murithi, 2005. This article examines how these external conditions shaped the OAU's diplomacy, its internal contradictions, and its eventual transformation into the African Union (AU) in 2002.

Statement of the Problem
Research on the OAU often focuses on its internal weaknesses such as rigid sovereignty, limited funding, slow consensus-based decision making, and the principle of non-interference. While these factors affected the organization, they do not alone explain the OAU's challenges. A major part of the problem lies in the strong influence that global powers and institutions exercised over African states throughout the period under study. Struggles for Africa's independence coincided with the Cold War, a time when the United States and the Soviet Union competed intensely for allies. Their involvement in African conflicts, liberation struggles, and diplomatic alliances shaped the way African states related to one another within the framework of the OAU (Westad, 2005)

Africa's economic dependence on foreign markets, creditors, and donors influenced OAU decisions. Debt crises, structural adjustment, and reliance on aid limited the policy choices available to African governments and in turn, to the OAU as a regional body (Mkandawire, 1999). Yet despite these realities, many studies treat the OAU primarily as an African institution shaped by African agency alone. This leaves a gap in understanding how external pressures influenced the organization's goals, operations, and eventual transformation.

The central problem this article addresses is the impact of external influences on the OAU from 1963 to 2002. It asks how Cold War rivalry, global economic forces, external political expectations, and international institutional pressures shaped the OAU's diplomacy, unity, and effectiveness. By examining these influences, the study explains why the OAU struggled to fulfill its mandate and why African leaders later chose to replace it with a new organization.

Methodology
This work adopts a qualitative historical approach based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources. Primary materials include speeches by African leaders, OAU declarations, United Nations records, liberation movement documents, and official communiqués from major summits such as Sirte (1999), Lome (2000), Lusaka (2001), and Durban (2002). Secondary sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and reputable historical studies that examine African diplomacy, Pan-Africanism, Cold War politics, and regional integration.

The method relies on textual analysis, comparative interpretation, and historical contextualization. This approach is appropriate because the study seeks to explain how external forces shaped political decisions and institutional outcomes. By comparing African diplomatic choices with global political developments, the research identifies patterns of influence and constraint. All citations follow the American Psychological Association (APA) format, ensuring clarity and academic consistency.

Contextual Overview
The influence of external powers on African unity is rooted in the immediate post-war world. The ideological contest between capitalism and socialism spread into Africa as both superpowers sought allies and strategic advantage (Young, 1994). During this period, African states had limited economic stability, weak industrial bases, and heavy dependence on foreign assistance. These conditions created an environment in which external pressures such as political, economic, and military shaped the choices of African states within the OAU

Cold War Alignments and the Fragmentation of Continental Diplomacy
The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was established in 1963 with the aim of promoting African unity, sovereignty, and collective diplomacy while prioritizing the eradication of colonialism and apartheid alongside peaceful dispute resolution (Zartman, 1992). From its inception, however, the OAU's mission was undermined by Cold War rivalries, as Africa became a proxy battleground for the United States and Soviet Union ideological competition (Clapham, 1996). This external contest fractured continental diplomacy and hampered the OAU's ability to function as a unified body. Pre-OAU divisions between the radical Casablanca bloc led by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, and Sekou Toure of Guinea, who favored immediate political unity and Soviet-aligned socialism and the moderate Monrovia bloc, including Leopold Senghor of Senegal and Felix Houphouet-Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire, who emphasized gradual economic cooperation and Western ties, persisted into the Addis Ababa inaugural summit (Legum, 1999). These rifts, concealed under unity phrase, were exploited by superpowers. The United States viewed Africa as a barricade against communism, fearing Soviet infiltration via anti-colonial movements, exemplified by CIA involvement in Patrice Lumumba's assassination in 1961 in Congo and subsequent support for Joseph Mobutu (De Witte, 2001). On the other hand, the Soviet Union supported liberation struggles in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Ethiopia with arms, training, and aid to advance socialist influence (Stockwell, 1978). Such alignments paralyzed the OAU Liberation Committee, formed in 1963 to aid anti-colonial efforts, as member states backed rival factions based on superpower patronage (Amate, 1986). In Angola, Soviet and Cuban supported MPLA clashed with U.S. Zaire and South Africa backed UNITA and FNLA, preventing consensus (Marcum, 1978).

The 1975-76 Angolan crisis highlighted this paralysis: post-Portuguese withdrawal, OAU members split on MPLA recognition amid Cuban and South African interventions, underscoring sovereignty principles that blocked decisive action (Birmingham,1995). Similarly, the 1977-78 Ogaden War saw Soviet shifts from Somalia to Ethiopia (with Cuban troops), drawing U.S. support to Somalia and deepening OAU divisions despite mediation attempts by Julius Nyerere and Haile Selassie (Woodward, 1996). Cold War dynamics also split OAU debates on government recognition.

Guinea-Bissau's 1973 independence declaration by Soviet-backed PAIGC divided members, with Western-aligned states hesitant while socialist Africa endorsed it swiftly (Chabal, 2002). On apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia, radicals like Angola and Tanzania pushed Soviet-favored militancy, opposed by Western-supported moderates favoring negotiation (Landsberg, 2005).

Ultimately, bloc voting, walkouts, and external patronage fragmented OAU summits and global representation, eroding its diplomatic credibility (Ajala, 1982). By the late 1980s, post-Cold War exhaustion exposed these flaws, paving the way for the African Union's 2002 formation to address unresolved conflicts and interference (Kioko, 2003)

Foreign Economic Pressures and the Limits of OAU's Development Agenda
From its very beginning, the OAU firmly acknowledged that true political independence would be incomplete without achieving economic freedom. The 1963 Addis Ababa Charter emphasized cooperation in economic, scientific, and technical fields as the foundation for African unity and self-reliance (Ajayi, 1998). However, the OAU's economic ambitions faced major roadblocks from foreign economic pressures, growing external debt, harsh structural adjustment programs, and control by global financial institutions. These external forces made it very hard for the OAU to carry out independent development plans. One of the early problems was economic dependence inherited from colonial rule. Many African countries remained linked to their former colonizers through trade patterns, currency arrangements, and foreign investments (Herbst 2000). Efforts to diversify economies or boost trade within Africa often failed due to lack of infrastructure, mistrust between countries, and competing national interests (Mkandawire, 1999).

Although the OAU always promoted economic cooperation as key to African unity and development, many member states prioritized relations with Western powers or institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (Watkins, 1995). These external ties often overshadowed the OAU's efforts to create unified continent-wide plans, which showed how deeply colonial legacies and immediate financial needs shaped member states' choices. The oil price shocks of the 1970s showed African economies' vulnerability. Higher oil prices worsened financial problems for non-oil exporting countries while oil producers like Nigeria and Algeria sometimes followed their own policies that clashed with African collective goals (Amin, 1972). Even though the OAU pushed for African solidarity through meetings and programs, many countries became more dependent on foreign loans to cover imports and government spending. This increased reliance hurt economic independence and weakened the OAU's vision for real unity (Bates, 1981).

By the early 1980s, Africa faced a harsh debt crisis, with many countries spending much of their budgets on debt repayments, leaving little for development projects (Gulhati, 1989). In response, the IMF and World Bank imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), forcing African countries to devalue currencies, open markets, and privatize state-owned companies (White, 1984). While the goal was to stabilize economies, these programs often caused social pain, reduced government control, and increased poverty (Mkandawire, 1999). Many African leaders, such as Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, spoke out against SAPs, viewing them as foreign-imposed policies that ignored African realities and harmed sovereignty (Sankara, 1988). Yet, because of heavy debt and lack of alternatives, most governments reluctantly accepted these measures, despite knowing their harmful social effects. Nigeria's experience in the 1980s showed that while GDP grew, unemployment rose and farmers suffered due to subsidy cuts and currency devaluation (Ezeani, 2004).

These tensions exposed limits to sovereignty and the difficulty of balancing global demands and local needs. Within the OAU, debates on SAPs showed the group's limited power to defend member countries against outside economic pressure (Watkins, 1995). The OAU did create a bold plan, the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980, focused on African self-reliance by building industries, increasing trade within Africa, and reducing foreign aid dependence (Adepoju, 1993). However, it struggled because many African countries were heavily in debt and depended on IMF and World Bank funds that came with strict conditions contrary to the plan's goals. Poor coordination within the OAU and limited funding made collective implementation difficult (Herbst, 2000). The Lagos Plan's vision was effectively sidelined when the World Bank's 1981 Berg Report took charge, pushing market reforms like cutting government spending, removing price controls, and privatizing companies (White, 1984). These reforms deepened social suffering and reduced state power, marking a sharp break from the Lagos Plan's ideas of collective growth and self-reliance (Bates, 1981).

This conflict showed the OAU's weak position in defending African interests amid strong global economic forces (Adepoju, 1993). By the 1990s, IMF and World Bank policies had weakened the OAU's role as a development leader. The clash between imposed reforms and African plans like Lagos revealed its limited grip on protecting members' interests. Globalization pushed trade liberalization and capital flows that ignored Africa's challenges, further weakening continental strategies. African countries struggled with volatile markets, dependence on raw material exports, and rapid urbanization without strong industrial policies. Donors linked aid to political reforms such as democratization and good governance, which, while positive, also limited African sovereignty (Mkandawire 1999; Watkins, 1995).

Thus, the OAU remained mostly symbolic in terms of development. External economic structures, including aid conditions and global trade rules, often shaped Africa's future more than African initiatives (Bates, 1981). Heavy reliance on external funds constrained the OAU's ability to design and follow independent development paths, keeping Africa trapped in a cycle of dependency and undermining true economic transformation (Ajayi, 1998). The OAU's development goals were largely shaped by outside forces instead of African choices, as a result kept the vision for self-reliant African growth out of reach (Adepoju, 1993).

External Interventions and the OAU's Conflict Management Failures
The Organization of African Unity (OAU) faced big problems in handling regional conflicts because it stuck firmly to non-interference in member states' internal affairs (Amate, 1986). This rule limited direct action, even though the OAU served as a place for talks and mediation through its Assembly and special committees. Its need for full agreement and respect for sovereignty made it slow and reactive, leading to uneven results in preventing or settling conflicts across Africa (Zartman, 1992). Patrice Lumumba's killing, Katanga's secession, and the chaos drew in the UN, Western powers, and later the Soviets (De Witte, 2001). The Congo crisis from 1960-1965, although it began before the OAU was formed, showed Africa's weakness to outside interference, but the OAU stayed quiet due to its sovereignty rule and Cold War splits (Clapham, 1996).

The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) was the OAU's first real test, most members backed Nigeria's unity, but Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, and Tanzania supported Biafra, a decision influenced by humanitarian concerns and outside pressure. The OAU tried peace talks in Kinshasa and set up a committee, but divisions among member states, lack of enforcement power, and distrust failed the effort (Legum, 1962). France secretly supported and supplied arms to Biafra because of economic interests like oil concessions and strategic rivalry with Britain in order to weaken the Anglophone Nigeria and expand its influence in Francophone Africa, a position that complicated OAU consensus. (Stockwell, 1978). The OAU stopped wider recognition of Biafra and backed Nigeria; however, the conflict stressed the OAU's inability to override member states' conflicting positions when external powers amplified divisions (Ajala, 1982).
The Angolan Civil War further exposed the OAU's weakness as Angola became a Cold War battleground After Portugal's withdrawal in 1975. Rival superpowers and external interests overshadowed African mediation efforts and internal divisions within the OAU limited its ability to enforce peace. The Soviet and Cuba backed MPLA to take Luanda, while U.S, South Africa, and Zaire supported UNITA and FNLA fought back (Marcum, 1978). The OAU recognized the MPLA in 1976, giving it African backing despite splits among members (Birmingham, 1995). But Cold War games and internal fights kept the war going for decades, with the OAU unable to stop outside powers (Woodward, 1996).

The Ogaden War (1977-78) between Ethiopia and Somalia showed more limits. . In July 1977, Somalia invaded Ethiopia's Ogaden region, aiming to unite all Somali people in the territory. The Soviet Union first supported Somalia but then switched to back Ethiopia, by supplying arms, advisors and troops (Woodward, 1996). The OAU condemned the invasion but could not mediate due to member splits and superpower pulls. The outcome of the war was heavily shaped by Soviet arms and Cuban troops on Ethiopia's side, and this illustrated how African conflicts were internationalized beyond the OAU's control (Clapham, 1996).

In the case of Chad, the civil wars from the 1960s through the 1980s reflected another pattern of external involvement. Chad's civil wars were driven mainly by internal ethnic, regional and political tensions after independence in 1960. The northern Muslim populations rebelled against the southern-dominated government, leading to the rise of the National Liberation Front of Chad (FROLINAT). External powers, especially Libya and France, intervened; Libya supported northern rebels and occupied parts of Chad, while France backed the southern government with troops.

Despite the OAU's peace efforts, Cold War rivalries and local divisions kept the conflict going until a 1988 cease-fire. The wars caused massive suffering, with atrocities, famine and deep social fractures (Burbidge, 1995). In 1981, the OAU launched its first-ever peacekeeping mission in Chad to separate warring factions and help stabilize the country. The force mainly made up of troops from Nigeria, Senegal and Zaire, faced big challenges like lack of funds, no prior ceasefire and constant fighting. Despite noble goals such as supervising ceasefires, helping with elections and integrating the army, the mission struggled to control the conflict fully. It marked a milestone for African-led peacekeeping but showed how tough regional efforts can be without strong backing and clear mandates (Amate, 1986; Zartman 1992). French forces ended up dominating (Burbidge, 1995).

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 exposed the OAU's limits in dealing with mass atrocities in the post-Cold War era. The OAU had always prioritized sovereignty and non-interference, but the scale and speed of the genocide, where over a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed, challenged its effectiveness and credibility. Despite attempts at mediation and peacekeeping, including later setting up an independent panel to investigate, the OAU struggled to stop the violence while the international community, including the UN, showed slow response and limited intervention. This tragedy revealed how the OAU's traditional principles were outpaced by the urgent need for decisive action against genocide (Prunier, 1995; Dallaire, 2004).

In all these cases; Nigeria, Angola, Horn of Africa, Chad, Rwanda outside powers like superpowers, France, and Libya shaped results more than the OAU (Legum,1999). The group's focus on sovereignty blocked strong steps, even in human rights crises, leaving mediation as its main but weak tool (Ajala, 1982). The idea of "African solutions to African problems" got lost in outside pressures and internal splits.

The OAU and the Politics of Non-Alignment
Non-alignment was key to African diplomacy during the Cold War and shaped the OAU's position strongly (Legum, 1999). African states wanted to stay out of both the US capitalist bloc and the Soviet socialist bloc to protect their new sovereignty and avoid neo-imperialism. The OAU made non-alignment a main rule, pushing unity, sovereignty, and liberation while working with the Non-Aligned Movement to show Africa's independence in world politics (Ajala, 1982). At the 1961 Belgrade Non-Aligned Conference, leaders like Nkrumah of Ghana and Nasser of Egypt said real freedom meant no great power control over economics or strategy, not just politics (Willetts, 1978). By 1963, when the OAU was formed, it fully backed non-alignment as Article III of the OAU Charter made this clear, rejecting Cold War alliances and fighting colonialism (Amate, 1986).

The OAU was not officially in the Non-Aligned Movement but followed its ideas closely. The 1978 Khartoum resolution restated non-alignment as Africa's way to stay united against bloc pressures (Zartman, 1992). Meetings in Algiers, Lusaka, and Addis Ababa matched NAM calls for sovereignty and no outside interference. This teamwork gave Africa a stronger voice worldwide (Clapham, 1996). In 1964, the OAU Cairo Declaration called Africa a nuclear-free zone, banning nuclear weapons to challenge US and Soviet plans (Ajayi, 1998). The UN backed this with Resolution 2033 in 1965, and the 1996 Pelindaba Treaty later made it law. Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia took heavy Soviet and Cuban aid, while Zaire and Cote d'Ivoire leaned on the West (Stockwell 1978). Africa aimed for non-alignment but faced real pressures. Some states tilted East, others West, based on their needs for survival (Herbst, 2000). This mix of unity and splits marked Africa's Cold War story, with non-alignment as both goal and tough balance (Marcum, 1978).

Despite these contradictions, the OAU used the language of non-alignment to justify collective positions in global forums. During United Nations debates, African delegations consistently opposed superpower interventions in the Third World, supported Palestinian self-determination and rejected apartheid South Africa's alliance with the West (Landsberg, 2005). At the 1973 OAU Summit in Addis Ababa, African leaders explicitly tied Africa's decolonization agenda to the broader Non-Aligned struggle against imperialism and racial domination (Legum, 1999).

During the Vietnam War and the later US-Soviet detente, the OAU played a key mediating role by urging negotiated settlements and respecting smaller nations' sovereignty. For example, the OAU's statements aligned with global calls for peace as tensions escalated and superpowers sought indirect cooperation to avoid direct conflict. This reflected Africa's non-aligned position, promoting dialogue over war and pushing for peaceful solutions amid global Cold War rivalries (Birmingham, 1995). While these interventions did not alter superpower strategies, they enhanced Africa's moral standing in world politics. By consistently advocating peace and sovereignty, Africa earned respect as a voice for justice and non-alignment, showing it was not just caught in the Cold War but actively shaping its narrative

By the 1980s, however, the credibility of African non-alignment weakened as economic crises deepened. The debt trap and structural adjustment programs tied many African states more closely to Western financial institutions, while Soviet influence waned with the collapse of its global reach. (Mkandawire, 1999).
The OAU's claims of non-alignment started to feel hollow as African states grew economically dependent on outside powers in new ways. Despite political calls for unity and independence, many countries relied heavily on Western loans, aid and economic structures shaped by former colonizers, which limited true autonomy. This economic dependency weakened the ideal of non-alignment, turning it more into expression than reality by the 1990s (Bates, 1981).

The OAU's commitment to non-alignment was a powerful statement of African unity and resistance to Cold War pressures, grounding smaller states in a shared language of independence and solidarity. However, persistent economic dependencies and external interventions weakened this stance, making non-alignment more an ideal than a fully realized policy. Still, the OAU's role in promoting sovereignty and collective diplomacy provided a crucial framework for African states to navigate global rivalries, even if it fell short of complete autonomy. This legacy remains important as its shaped Africa's ongoing struggle to balance ideals of independence with real world (Ajala, 1982). But economic needs and outside meddling made it more ideal than fact. Still, it gave Africa a way to handle global fights and left a key legacy for balancing freedom with reality (Zartman 1992).

From the OAU to the African Union: External Pressures and the Drive for Institutional Renewal
The transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) in 2002 witnessed a decisive turning point in Africa's continental politics. It was not simply a matter of replacing one organization with another, but the culmination of decades of institutional frustration, political compromise and external pressures. The OAU which was founded in 1963 with the noble objective of promoting unity, independence and cooperation among African states, quickly became constrained by its founding principles, particularly the doctrine of non-interference and the rigid protection of sovereignty. Over time, these principles created a contradiction in which the OAU could neither prevent conflicts nor intervene effectively in humanitarian crises. The failure of the OAU to evolve in line with Africa's changing needs was not merely a product of internal design flaws but was compounded by external pressures such as Cold War rivalries, global economic dependency, and the selective engagement of the international community and the demands of globalization. These external conditions forced African leaders to rethink continental governance and eventually produced the African Union, an organization intended to insulate Africa from vulnerability while projecting greater influence in global affairs (Kioko, 2003). It came after years of frustration with the OAU's limits, mixed with outside pressures. The OAU was formed in 1963 to build unity and independence, but its strict rules on non-interference and sovereignty blocked action on conflicts and crises (Clapham, 1996).

External forces like Cold War fights, economic dependence, and global changes pushed African leaders to create the AU for better protection and world influence (Adebajo, 2010). Cold War rivalries split the OAU from the start, as the US and Soviet Union competed for African allies (Stockwell, 1978). Wars in Angola and Mozambique saw outside powers like China and Cuba shape results, weakening African unity (Marcum, 1978). After the Cold War ended in 1991, Africa lost its bargaining power. Soviet aid vanished, and US interest dropped, leaving economies open to IMF and World Bank reforms that cut spending and increased debt (Mkandawire, 1999; White, 1984). The 1994 Rwandan genocide showed the OAU's weakness and world indifference (Prunier, 1995). Its small monitoring team lacked funds and could not stop the killing of over a million people (Dallaire, 2004). The UN pulled back peacekeeping operations, just like in Liberia and Sierra Leone where outside help came only when it suited big powers (Burbidge, 1995). This led to the idea of "African solutions to African problems," which became the AU's main goal (Zartman, 1992).

The inadequacies of the OAU became increasingly glaring in the 1990s. Regional organizations such as ECOWAS intervened militarily in Liberia and Sierra Leone when the OAU stood aside, highlighting the redundancy of the continental body (Adepoju, 1993). In Somalia, the OAU played virtually no role in the peace process, leaving the task to the United Nations and external powers (Woodward, 1996). Scholars like John F. Clark said the OAU was outdated, stuck on sovereignty and unable to lead According to Clark, the OAU's rigid adherence to sovereignty and consensus meant that it could neither discipline wayward member states nor provide the leadership required to confront external challenges. (Clark, 2001). The end of the Cold War also brought the rise of new global norms that the OAU was ill-equipped to accommodate. Western governments increasingly linked aid and development assistance to democratization, good governance and human rights (Herbst, 2000).

It was within this wider push for renewal that a series of key summits shaped the final transition from the OAU to the African Union. The first summit was the Sirte Declaration of 1999 in Libya, where African leaders agreed that the AOU could no longer meet the demands of a changing world and called for a new body with stronger powers in peace, security and economic (Amate, 1986). The 2000 Lome Summit adopted the AU Constitutive Act (Kioko, 2003). Lusaka in 2000 planned the switch, and Durban in 2002 launched the AU (Adebajo, 2010). These steps fixed OAU flaws amid globalization and security needs (Clapham, 1996).

It was against this conditions that the movement for institutional renewal gathered pace. The Sirte Declaration of 1999, championed by Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, called for the creation of a new African Union capable of meeting the challenges of the new millennium The declaration reflected both internal frustration with the OAU's failures and external pressures arising from globalization. African leaders recognized that the continent could not afford to remain fragmented in an era where blocs such as the European Union (EU), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) were shaping the rules of international trade and diplomacy (Adedeji, 1999. The AU was conceived not only as a corrective to the OAU's failures but also as a means of enhancing Africa's bargaining power in a globalized world. (Adebajo & Landsberg, 2006).

The Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in 2000, represented a significant departure from the OAU Charter. Most notably, Article 4(h) authorized the Union to intervene in cases of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, marking a rejection of the principle of non-interference (Kioko, 2003). The AU also established stronger institutions, such as the Peace and Security Council, the Pan-African Parliament and the African Court of Justice, to ensure that continental governance was not limited to symbolism but had the capacity for enforcement (Zartman, 1992). These reforms were an acknowledgment that the OAU's design flaws had crippled its relevance, but also that Africa's external environment demanded a stronger and more proactive institution.

External actors influenced not only the AU's creation but also its agenda. The European Union, often seen as a model of regional integration, provided both inspiration and partnership for the AU's institutional architecture (Landsberg, 2005). Furthermore, Africa's marginalization in global forums such as the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Security Council underscored the urgency of speaking with a unified voice (Ajala, 1982). In evaluating the OAU's failure, it is important to recognize that the organization was not entirely without achievements. It successfully supported decolonization, coordinated the struggle against apartheid and provided a platform for African states to interact diplomatically (Legum, 1999). Scholars such as Christopher Clapham and Adekeye Adebajo argue that the OAU's greatest failure was its inability to balance state sovereignty with collective responsibility (Clapham, 1996; Adebajo, 2010). The AU came from OAU failure and real need. External pressures made change urgent in a global world (Herbst, 2000). The switch aimed to protect Africa and strengthen its global role (Kioko, 2003).

Conclusion

This study has examined the ways in which external actors shaped the priorities, limitations, and institutional choices of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) from its founding to its transformation into the African Union (AU). The evidence presented demonstrates that the OAU operated in an international environment marked by ideological conflict, economic dependence, and shifting global security concerns. These forces influenced African diplomacy, complicated regional responses to conflicts, and constrained the organisation's development agenda. Although African leaders established the OAU to protect sovereignty and promote unity, they were often compelled to negotiate between domestic pressures and the demands of powerful states and international institutions. This tension reduced the organisation's effectiveness in conflict resolution and development planning, while simultaneously pushing it towards institutional reform. The transition to the African Union reflected an effort to address both internal weaknesses and the changing global order at the end of the twentieth century. Understanding these pressures helps clarify the broader challenges of African regionalism and provides insight into why the AU adopted stronger mechanisms for peace, governance, and integration. The findings of this article show that the OAU's history cannot be understood without reference to the external influences that shaped its choices, nor can Africa's pursuit of unity be separated from the wider international structures within which it must operate.

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