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Who is in the “We”? Interrogating the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and Youth Political Participation

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ABSTRACT

Most analyses of the African Union (AU) have focused on the politics of the state and the presidents. There are very few analyses that have focused on aspects such as youth development. The point of departure for this article therefore, is youth development. I argue that although the youth were always part of important historical developments in Africa, they remain on the periphery. In recent times, particularly since the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the AU in the 2000s, the youth development agenda has begun to receive the attention at policy level. In 2015 the AU, through Agenda 2063 went a step further by including youth development into mainstream continental policy frameworks. While we welcome all these developments it has emerged that the continent remains hesitant in the area of youth development. Where the AU and its member states have adopted the discourse of youth inclusion—in cases where youth political participation is often limited, such efforts are not met with fitting institutional and practical policy arrangements. The article posits that the African elite is in for a rude awakening as we have witnessed—since 2011—given the discovery by the African youth of new methods of political participation in post-colonial Africa. The article advocates for the adoption of the African community outlook to youth state policy, argues for the youth to be linked to the project of economic freedom, and implores the African elite to embark on the decolonial project to resolve the bearing coloniality of being, power and knowledge.

Keywords: Agenda 2063; African Union; gerontocracy; political participation

Introduction: Surveying Youth Political Participation

Although the youth played an important role in the fight against colonialism in Africa, the liberating generation, upon taking office, did not see the need to have youth development at the center of state policy in the liberated zones. The youth were to



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regard themselves as beneficiaries of an independent Africa who must be grateful to the fearless freedom fighters who freed the continent from colonial rule. Twenty-four years after Namibia has attained independence, former President Hifikepunye Pohamba gave this warning to the youth of Namibia on 26 August 2014: “this [liberation struggle] was not easy as some of you want to believe. It was hard, long and bitter and we, the old freedom fighters, fought to the end and liberated the country and the people. Some of us lost our lives because of this right cause” (Shivute 2014).

In some extreme cases the liberating heroes expected the youth to sing praises to them—and this in turn led to some forms of dictatorship. In Malawi President Kamuzu Banda ensured that everything in Malawi revolved around him. As Malawian academic, Wiseman Chijere Chirwa explains “throughout the 1960s, political songs reflected Banda’s consolidation of power and his emerging dictatorship. Because of his heroic triumph, everything in the country belonged to him” (Chirwa 2001, 8). African leaders of the liberation struggle even created concepts and philosophies that were forced down the throats of the citizens as national philosophies and concepts. South African Political Scientist Prince Mashele explains such an occurrence in Kenya:

In Kenya, during the reign of Daniel Arap Moi... citizens were obliged to follow in the footsteps of Moi. To entrench his despotism, Moi introduced a philosophy called Nyayo (footstep), projecting himself as a pathfinder and the rest of society as followers. Political commentators who dared not to follow in Moi’s footsteps faced one of two hard realities: you disappear or flee to exile. So serious was Moi about his Nyayo philosophy that he could replace a vice-chancellor of any university with someone prepared to follow in the correct political footsteps. (Mashele 2011, 23)

The continent is therefore, nourished with many examples illustrating how African leaders of the liberation perceived post-independent Africa as a personal trophy they obtained for liberating the continent through their heroic deeds. The citizens, particularly the youth, must at all time—it was made clear—be grateful and celebrate the freedom fighters and allow them to rule undisturbed. Fast forward to 2017, Africa still has the oldest leaders in the world. Below is Africa’s top 20 oldest presidents for illustrative purposes:

Table 1: Oldest leaders in Africa

Name	Country	Age
Robert Mugabe (Until 2018)	Zimbabwe	93
Beji Caid Essebsi	Tunisia	91
Paul Biya	Cameroon	84
Abselaziz Bouteflika	Algeria	80
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	Liberia	79
Alpha Conde	Guinea	79
Peter Mutharika	Malawi	77

Name	Country	Age
Hage Geingob	Namibia	76
Teodoro Obiang Mbasogo	Equatorial Guinea	75
Jose Eduardo dos Santos	Angola	75
Alassane Ouattara	Cote d'ivoire	75
Jacob Zuma (Until 2018)	South Africa	75
Mohammadu Buhari	Nigeria	74
Denis Ngueso	Congo	74
Akufo Addo	Ghana	73
Yoweri Museveni	Uganda	73
Pakalitha Mosilili	Lesotho	73
Omar al-Bashir	Sudan	73
Ibrahim Boubacar Keita	Mali	72
Ismail Omar Guelleh	Djibouti	71

To put the above information in the table in fitting context and to show that African liberation leaders see themselves as the only ones fit to govern Africa, it is necessary to juxtapose table 1 above with table 2 below, with longest-serving leaders. Table 2 shows that most of Africa's oldest leaders are also the longest-serving leaders. Although it would appear that the oldest would obviously be the longest serving, it must be borne in mind however, that while Ghana's Akufo Addo may be Africa's 15th oldest leader, he has served for just over a year, having been elected to office only in January 2017. Namibia's Hage Geingob is Africa's 8th oldest leader, but has only spent three years in office, since his inauguration in March 2015.

Table 2: Africa's longest-serving leaders

Name	Country	Years in office
Paul Biya	Cameroon	42
Teodoro Obiang Mbasogo	Equatoria Guinea	38
Jose Eduardo dos Santos	Angola	38
Robert Mugabe	Zimbabwe	37
Yoweri Museveni	Uganda	31
Omar al-Bashir	Sudan	28
Idris Deby	Chad	27
Isaias Afwerki	Eritrea	26
Paul Kagame	Rwanda	23
Denis Sassou Nguesso	Congo	20

This state of African leadership has not only generated interest in foreign scholars such as Aguilar (1998) from countries led by relatively younger leaders. African scholars and

researchers have also taken keen interest in this debate. This debate is captured around the concept of gerontocracy. Nigerian academic Omotade Adegbindin explains that a gerontocracy “is a political system, a form of oligarchical rule, whereby a small group of elderly individuals are in control of power. Unpopular due to its peculiar nature, it is in short, a rule by old men” (Adegbindin 2011, 454). Drawing from other scholars to contextualise this concept, Adegbindin (2011, 455) captures Dei (1994, 13), who explains that in African tradition a gerontocracy is seen as occurring where “respect for the authority of elderly persons for their wisdom, knowledge of community affairs, and ‘closeness’ to the ancestors... there is in Africa a general belief that “old age comes with wisdom and an understanding of the world.” Kenyan academic Peter Onyango Onyoyo provides clarity in detail:

Gerontocracy is the rule by elders or a type of government that associates leadership with elders. ... Ipso facto in several African traditional societies in which customary law ruled the lives of people the role of elders was substantial and critical for order and harmony. The elders are construed to be the custodians of customary law, its promulgators and enforcers... In the post-independent Africa gerontocracy in the political sense has become notorious as some elders cling on power to dominate and favour their next of kin. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe is an example in which the leader sees his status as elder to be the reason to cling on power. The late Muammar Gaddafi did the same in Libya, President Paul Biya of Cameroon, and the late President Eyadema of Togo did the same. Elders in political leadership in Africa have been associated with hunger for power other than wisdom. (Onyoyo 2017, 2–3)

It should therefore, come not as a surprise that the entire structure of OAU did not have a clear and specialised function dedicated to the continental youth development agenda. The Pan-African Youth Movement (PYM), which later became the Pan-African Youth Union (PYU) was established in 1962 (a year before the founding of OAU in 1963) and was recognised by OAU, but was never integrated into its activities. Historically, PYM consisted of the youth of the African ruling political parties in general, as well as the youth of former liberation movements in particular. After attaining independence PYM lost currency in the eyes of the liberating leaders, subsequently losing momentum (National Union of Eritria Youth Student 2012). The African Union (AU), the successor of OAU was established in 1999 and only became concerned with the youth development agenda seven years after its formation. This is confirmed in the AU 2011 *State of the African Youth Report 2011* in no uncertain terms:

Africa’s commitment to youth development and welfare was amply manifested in 2006 with the adoption by African Heads of State and Government of the African Youth Charter. The charter provides a framework for developing and implementing more tangible youth policies and programmes. (African Union Commission 2012, VII)

In the foreword of the same report, Professor Jean-Pierre Ezin, the then Commissioner for Human Resource, Science and Technology of the African Union Commission (AUC)

summarised what according to him was continental commitment to the continental youth development agenda:

The African Union Commission has come a long way in its efforts to promote youth development and empowerment in Africa. It developed the African Youth Charter, which was approved by African Heads of State and Government in 2006 and which entered into force in a relatively short time. The Charter constitutes a continental legal framework that seeks to re-position the challenges, potential, contributions, and rights of young people in the mainstream of Africa's socio-economic growth and development. In 2009, the AU the Executive Council declared the years (2009-2018) as the Decade for Youth Development and Empowerment in Africa. Subsequently, the AU Ministers in Charge of Youth Affairs approved the Decade Plan of Action (DPoA) – a roadmap for accelerating the implementation of the charter. By deciding to focus on the theme *Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development* for the 2011 Summit of African Union Heads of State and Government, the AU demonstrates the importance it attaches to the role and contribution of the youth in the development process. (African Union Commission 2012, VI)

The mindset of leaders of the liberation—of expecting the youth to be grateful to political freedom fighters has extended to the technical staff of AUC. How else does one explain AUC commissioner Ezin's conclusion that something as flimsy as a theme can be regarded as demonstrating the importance that AU attaches to the role and contribution of the youth in the development process? In 2011 the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) released its *2011 African Youth Report*. Abdoulie Janneh, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa at the time did not conceal the reality of the exclusion and (non) participation of African youth in decision making:

As argued in this report, young people need an enabling environment politically, economically and socially to thrive in our countries. They need to be empowered so that they can be represented and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Though Africa has made progress in providing education and skills for more young people than ever before, youth unemployment and underemployment remain a major challenge. Innovative approaches and in-depth analysis of youth issues at both the design and implementation phases of policies and programmes are needed to ensure effective delivery and better outcomes towards a great future for the young women and men of Africa. (Economic Commission for Africa 2011)

To its credit, AU distinguished itself from OAU by establishing a youth division within the structures of AUC. According to AU, the “youth division under the Department of Human Resource, Science & Technology (HRST) is the division responsible for Africa's Youth Agenda in the African Union Commission (AUC)” (African Union Commission 2017). Most importantly, AU's language and articulation of the importance of the youth division is the most telling in the subsequent sentences:

It [Youth Division] promotes youth participation such as organizing youth forums and celebrating Africa Youth Day. By harmonizing and coordinating member states as well as bringing together

all relevant stakeholders, the youth division is mandated to among other functions, to use the outcomes and recommendations from all sectors through appropriate training frameworks to strengthen the African Youth. (African Union Commission 2017)

The above statement simply implies that according to AU, youth participation should be marked by flimsy occasions such as “celebrating Youth Day.” This mindset is similar to that of Kamuzu Banda of Malawi as discussed earlier, who relegated the role of the youth and women to singing, clapping hands and celebrating him. AU makes it clear that the mandate of the division is not to allow the youth to be involved in decision making, but merely to receive and accept *outcomes* and *recommendations*. From 21–25 May 2016, AU held what came to be known as the Banjul+10 Summit on the 10 years implementation of the African Youth Charter in The Gambia to review the progress made with regards to the African Youth Charter since its adoption in 2006. It was found that most African states still did not ratify the Charter. In the outcome document AU set a target date for a “hundred percent ratification by the end of 2016” (African Union 2016). Speaking at the Potsdam dialogues on the future prospects for African youth in Germany on 6 April 2017, AUC Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology Martial De-Paul Ikounga disclosed that the wishful target of 100 per cent ratification of the Charter that was set in Banjul the previous year was not achieved (Ikounga 2017).

What emerges clear from the above is that to OAU and its successor AU, youth agenda is either a non-issue or peripheral issue. In response, the youth did not sit idle. There has been quite a huge response from the African youth. Although PYU enjoyed cordial relations with both OAU and AU, it encountered several challenges—particularly challenges related to finance, given the somewhat “arm-chair” approach of the leadership of the continental body. The continental youth body was forced to change the location of its headquarters three times—from Conakry, in Guinea, to Algiers, Algeria in 1967; from Algiers to Khartoum, Sudan, in 2008 (National Union of Eritrea Youth Student 2012). Speaking at the African Youth Day on 1 November 2012, former chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma admitted that there were enormous challenges faced by PYU—thus assuring the youth of AUC’s commitment to embark on the “the *revitalization* of the Pan African Youth Union” (The Point 2012). It does not take a sophisticated person to note that revitalisation can only take place when an organisation is faced with decline and is weakening.

From 1 to 4 November 2013 in Tunisia, AUC, in collaboration with the New Partnership for African Development's (NEPAD) coordinating Agency, the African Development Bank, and the ECA organised a youth consultative meeting on the envisaged Agenda 2063. This meeting culminated in the formation of the African Union Youth Working Group (AUYWG). AUYWG later transformed itself into the African Youth Commission (AYC) that held its first General Assembly and elected the founding leadership in January 2017 at the sidelines of the AU Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Seeing itself as the youth version of AUC, AYC set its objective as an organisation where

all inspiring and capable young African leaders and African Diaspora can organize themselves, take up their responsibilities, strengthen cooperation among the youth and youth structures as a platform, speak up and promote youth voices in the context of Africa's development." (African Youth Commission 2017)

It further outlines its objectives as:

to organize all young people in Africa and Diaspora for the promotion of African unity and development through linkage of youth and youth structures and mobilization of resources (human, technical, technology and finance) to support the work of African youth, youth structures, Pan African Youth Union and Youth Division of the African Union Commission in their quest to effective service delivery and advocacy activities on the African Youth Charter, other AU legal instruments and youth projects at national, regional and continental levels for the advancement of Africa. (African Youth Commission 2017, 4)

As with the PYU, AU took an "arm-chair" approach to the affairs of the AYC—although it played an indirect role in its formation. Closer to the time the African Youth Commission General Assembly convened in January 2017, the African Union Youth division released a statement that was seen as its attempt to either sabotage the continental body or exclude it from its activities. The statement, released on 13 January 2017, merely a week before the youth General Assembly read:

With regards to the upcoming AYC Annual General Assembly on the 22-25 January 2017 in Addis Ababa, we wish to categorically state that we have not been involved in the coordination of this event as has been erroneously reported across various media. Unfortunately, this avoidable situation is a misrepresentation that has caused confusion, particularly among prospective participants, and simultaneously hampered the event's credibility. (African Union Youth Division 2017)

After making such damaging remarks, the division still went on to state that it "encourage[d] pro-active initiatives of African youth in forming organizations, networks or think tanks as a response to the prevailing challenges that affect them; whether it is at the national, regional or continental levels" (African Union Youth Division 2017). Be that as it may, AYC General Assembly went ahead and elected its leadership. This meant that there were now two continental youth organisations—PYU and AYC. One of the arguments put forward by those at the forefront of AYC is that unlike PYU that is host to National Youth Councils, AYC membership is open to individual youth and civil society organisations that would not get an opportunity to engage in continental youth development agenda under the framework of PYU. The other argument against PYU is that it appears to be too political and aligned to ruling parties in Africa, some of which are responsible for the suppression of the youth, as well as underdevelopment. In other words, PYU, through its national youth councils, stands complicit.

There were responses by African youth to gerontocracies, authoritarianism, corruption, and underdevelopment outside PYU and AYC structures. One of the well-known

initiatives taken by the youth of Africa to ensure political participation is what came to be known as the Arab Springs— popular grassroots protests that took place in North Africa and toppled several African dictators. Ruge (2012) explains what underpinned the Arab Spring:

At the heart of the Arab Spring was a disgruntled youth class seeking democratic representation and economic participation. Remember Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor whose self-immolation launched the uprisings? He didn't set himself ablaze because he had a smart phone. His self-immolation was his last desperate attempt to bring attention to his economic exclusion. His peers in the region sympathized and, almost overnight, Tunisia and the political landscape of most of Northern Africa changed. It was a signal that Africa's ruling class was under siege. On one end Mr. Bouazizi, aged 26, represented Africa's emerging youth class, an impatient demographic eager to upend the status quo (he was only five years younger than the median Tunisian). On the other, deposed dictator Ben Ali, age 76, stood as a breed of elder statesmen – disconnected from the needs of populations, and facing extinction.

As dictators in North Africa were being toppled, their contemporaries in the rest of the continent worked hard to control the youth and to avoid similar uprisings. Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni is said to have deployed the military into the streets of Kampala to quell protests (Smith 2011). Despite these attempts, the youth in the zones with long-serving authoritarian leaders still managed to wage protests in one way or the other. Years later in 2014 the long-serving despot Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso was forced to flee the country. Pictures of youth jubilantly jumping on top of seats in the Parliament of Burkina Faso went viral on social media (Berman 2014). In stable democracies, where corruption and underdevelopment are rampant, particularly in Southern Africa, the youth formed radical social movements that called for transformation, social justice and equality. Consider the case of Namibia as explained by Namibian academic Phaniel Kaapama:

Namibia reached her Fanonian moment... a new generation has entered the country's social and political scene and has forcefully asked penetrating new questions. So, Namibia's 'Fanonian moment' has come in the form of the [Affirmative Repositioning] AR movement. Other issues that have come under the radar of AR's fervent political eye include the perceived/alleged widespread nepotism and corruption among the political and economic elite... the AR movement has 'declared war' on what it calls the "general zombie tendency" and its politics of hand-clapping and singing for the satisfaction of politicians, by working towards liberating the youth by converting them into active citizens and upright activists. (Kaapama 2016, 30–36)

In some parts of North Africa the youth took grave risks such as attempting to cross rivers and oceans into Europe in search of economic opportunities and political stability. Consider the case of The Gambia as reported by Hunt (2015):

for its size, the Gambia is experiencing a disproportionate number of people leaving the country. Its population is just under 2 million, yet over the past two years it has been ranked fourth

and fifth in the International Organisation for Migration's league of the six main nationalities identified attempting to cross the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy."

In North, East and West Africa some youth resolved to join armed military groups such as Boko Haram and others (Onuoha 2014). It is for this reason that in 2015 the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250, which urged members states to increase youth representation in decision making at all levels. The UN saw this as an incentive to prevent the youth from joining extremist movements as demonstrated by the rise of radicalisation among young people (Kemper 2017).

This account and survey of continental youth political participation and developmental agenda was necessary to buttress the point that the scope of analysis should not only concern itself with the centre and the institutions within its reach, but should also consider (a) that there exists a periphery, (b) the reasons for the periphery and (c) any interaction, between the centre and the periphery. Fundamental questions therefore, remain: *Who is in? Who is included in the center-led conversation and who do they represent? Who is out and what do they feel, and what are they going to do and are willing to do about it?* It is only when these questions are answered that we can be able to determine how youth political participation can be enhanced.

For methodological and contextual purposes, this article must be understood as both an analysis and observation of continental developmental agenda. As such, current observations may be vulnerable to a critique as "unacademic", particularly orthodox "Universalist" academics. Although not explicitly expressed herein, the author's orientation is that of a decolonial scholarship, whereby African agency and subjectivity must be allowed beyond Eurocentric rigidity and knowledge "norms." The article must also be seen to present in part the generational antagonism between the liberating generation (presently in power) and their offsprings, who advocate for economic freedom—the author belongs to the latter.

Agenda 2063 - Who is the "We"?

The Essence of Agenda 2063

Agenda 2063 is a programme of the AU, adopted by African Heads of State and governments, who assembled in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia at the 24th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union in January 2015. It became clear after the session that the African Heads of State and governments romanticised Agenda 2063 as

[an] endogenous plan for transformation. It harnesses the continent's comparative advantages such as its people, history and cultures; its natural resources; its position and repositioning in the world to effect equitable and people-centered social, economic and technological transformation and the eradication of poverty. It seeks to fulfil our obligation to our children as an inter-generational compact, to develop Africa's human capital; build social assets, infrastructure and public goods; empower women and youth; promote lasting peace and security; build effective

developmental states and participatory and accountable institutions of governance; Africa's vision and roadmap for sequencing our sectoral and normative, national, regional and continental plans into a coherent whole; A call to action to all Africans and people of African descent, to take personal responsibility for the destiny of the continent and as the primary agents of change and transformation; A commitment from citizens, leadership, governments and institutions at national, regional and continental levels to act, coordinate, and cooperate for the realization of this vision. (AU 2015, 13)

As a policy framework that aims to provide a collective developmental path for Africa's development, Agenda 2063 is anchored on seven pillars: (1) a prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development; (2) an integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance; (3) an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law; (4) a peaceful and secure Africa; (5) an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics; (6) an Africa whose development is people-driven and relies on the potential of the African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for the children; and (7) Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner (AU 2015).

Youth Content in Agenda 2063

While there might not be a specific aspiration that speaks to youth political participation, it is important to note that *aspiration 6* speaks of an Africa whose development is people driven and that relies on the potential of African people, especially its *youth*. In spite of tokenism analysis, Agenda 2063 departs from a longstanding tradition of OAU and AU of peripherarising youth development. In fact, the OAU Charter, in both Article II (purposes) and Article III (principles), makes no mention or inference to the youth (Elias 1965). The Constitutive Act of AU also did not change this state of affairs. Article 3 (on the Objectives of the AU) and Article 4 (on the Principles of the AU), do not even mention the youth (AU 2000). While some might argue that the youth does not necessarily warrant mentioning in these legislative instruments, it must be noted that the AU constitutive act mentions, in Article 4 the promotion of gender equality (often a twin to youth empowerment/inclusion) as one of the principles of the AU. Agenda 2063, therefore, departs from the AU tradition of placing youth at the periphery. The policy framework admits that "no society can reach its full potential, unless it empowers ... youth", and has set an objective of having an engaged and empowered youth (AU 2015). Furthermore, it articulates and makes the following daring declarations on youth as part of *Aspiration 6*:

- The youth of Africa shall be empowered socially, economically and politically through the full implementation of the African Youth Charter.
- All forms of systemic inequalities, exploitation, marginalisation, and discrimination of young people will be eliminated and youth issues mainstreamed in all development agendas.
- Youth unemployment will be eliminated, and Africa's youth guaranteed full access to education, training, skills and technology, health services, jobs and economic opportunities, recreational and cultural activities, as well as financial means and all necessary resources for them to realise their full potential.
- Young African men and women will be the path breakers of the African knowledge society, and will contribute significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship. The creativity, energy and innovation of Africa's youth shall be the driving force behind the continent's political, social, cultural and economic transformation.

It is evident that Agenda 2063 has some content on the youth. As stated before, the decision to place youth in central/mainstream AU documents is a critical point of departure from policy positions and approaches of both OAU and AU. Already in 2013 AU has started consulting with the youth on Agenda 2063. The outcomes of the consultations will later bear fruits if the content of Agenda 2063 is taken into consideration. In November 2013 in Hamamet, Tunisia, AU held consultations with the youth regarding Agenda 2063. It was at this gathering that the youth immaculately presented to AU their desire to actively participate in the politics and governance of AU and its member states. The youth went further to indicate that the Africa they want is one wherein they are involved in the drafting of policies and take active part in the implementation and monitoring process. At that conference youth political participation was invoked. Resultantly, a working group called the African Union Youth Working Group (AUYWG) was established to ensure that the resolution of the youth that were gathered there are included in the African developmental way forward in general and in Agenda 2063 in particular. Four years later in 2017 AUYWG has transformed itself into an independent continental youth organisation, the African Youth Commission (AYC), whose primary purpose is to monitor the AUC and the AU, and ensure that youth concerns are not placed at the periphery (Dhlamini 2017). This development alone indicates, not only the input the youth made into Agenda 2063, but their determination to create their own independent spaces and ensure political participation as well. The other aspects of youth consultation and input into Agenda 2063 took place at state level. The AU policy organ, at its July 2014 meeting in Equatorial Guinea, had tasked member states to embark on domestic consultations with various stakeholders (youth, academia, civil society, and women) and submit the outcomes to AUC by 31 October 2014. South Africa for example, held such consultation with the youth on 11 July 2014 (DIRCO 2015).

“It is in but Not in”

In November 2015 the biggest daily newspaper in Namibia, *The Namibian* ran a story that President Hage Geingob had temporarily moved out of the State House to his mansion on the outskirts of the capital city, Windhoek; to allow for expensive renovations that were in line with his taste. The Presidential Affairs minister, Frans Kapofi was at pain in explaining as to whether the president has moved out of the State House. In response to journalists, who were asking for confirmation as to whether the president has indeed moved out, Kapofi flip-flopped, stating the following; “he [president] is here but he is not here” (Immanuel and Mongudhi 2015). Kapofi’s explanation is a fitting importation to explain youth political participation in Agenda 2063, although slightly amended to “it is in, but not in.” While there is a considerable content and mention in Agenda 2063 of youth, it is not clear as to whether this constitutes political participation. The discourse adopted in Agenda 2063 speaks to what AU will do for youth and not what it can do with, or together with the youth. It portrays the youth as mere subjects that would benefit from the generosity of their elders, who have now mentioned them in policy documents. It makes statements such as “support young people” and uses many “othering” terms when discussing youth issues. The main version—the popular version of Agenda 2063 states the following as the actionable programmes that speak to youth:

Support young people as drivers of Africa’s renaissance, through investment in their health, education and access to technology, opportunities and capital, and concerted strategies to combat youth unemployment and underemployment. Ensure faster movement on the harmonization of continental admissions, curricula, standards, programmes and qualifications and raising the standards of higher education to enhance the mobility of African youth and talent across the continent. (AU 2015)

It is evident that the envisaged and actionable programme of Agenda 2063 does not include political participation. The discourse adopted in Agenda 2063 makes itself available to the interpretation that reform and youth inclusion is limited to health, education, technology, economic opportunities, and education. Youth political participation is not conspicuously part of Agenda 2063. The youth are thus perceived as readily available beneficiaries of the political generosity of their elders, who have now included their issues in key policy documents such as Agenda 2030. The youth are therefore, “In but not in” in Agenda 2063. Agenda 2063 is often paraded, and its content so read around the phrase “The Africa We Want.” Although it appears that the youth are indeed part of the “we”, or they might perceive themselves as part of the “we”, it appears on close inspection that the “we” is an exclusive imagery of the African Heads of State and government. As will be further elaborated later in the discussion, youth political participation remains a peripheral concern, despite making an appearance in key policy documents of the AU.

African Political Elite Orientation towards Youth Political Participation

As has been discussed earlier, youth matters have always been peripheral in the imagination and discourse of African political leaders. Therefore, if youth matters are kept to the periphery, one can only imagine how distant youth political participation would be in the minds of African political leaders. To understand how African leaders perceive the youth, one only needs to look at how African governments have conceptualised ministries dealing with youth affairs. A short illustration is thus necessary.

Table 3: Youth ministries in different African Countries

Country Name	Name of Ministry
Angola	Youth and Sports
Burkina Faso	Youth, Professional Education and Employment
Cameroon	Youth Affairs and Civic Education
DRC	Youth and Sports
Ethiopia	Youth and Sports
Gabon	Youth and Sports
Kenya	Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs
Lesotho	Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation
Liberia	Youth and Sports
Mali	Youth and Citizenship Building
Namibia	Youth, Sports and National Service
Nigeria	Youth Development
Rwanda	Youth and ICT
Senegal	Youth, Employment and Promotion of Civic Values
Sudan	Youth and Sports
The Gambia	Youth and Sports
Togo	Basic Development, Crafts, Youth and Youth Employment
Tunisia	Youth, Sports, Women and Families
Uganda	Youth and Children Affairs
Zimbabwe	Youth, Indigenization and Economic Empowerment

The above random selection of 20 African countries indicates that:

- a. Most African leaders see the role of the youth mainly as that of entertainers, chasing football, as well as dancing/singing during national events. It is for this reason that in most African countries youth ministries are placed together with recreation, sports, national service or civic education.
- b. Zimbabwe (sees the youth in relation to economic empowerment and indigenisation), Kenya (links youth affairs to planning) and Rwanda (links youth with ICT) and

provide a new and fresh perspective that departs from the orthodox linkage of youth to entertainment and sports.

- c. With the exception of few a cases, this illustrates that the youth are perceived as peripheral issues. It is therefore, clear that the youth are excluded in continental agenda setting.

As such, it can be argued that in spite of the fact that its predecessor (OAU) started off as a people-centered continental body that at one point assisted non-state actors fighting for national liberation, AU remains engaged in elite politics. It therefore, comes as no surprise that although Agenda 2063 speaks about fighting for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, AU recently resolved to admit Morocco to the African Union without a clear explanation and direction (Kazeem 2017). What is clear is that once an elite pact is concluded, the aspirations of young men and women fighting with determination in Western Sahara do not matter (Akwei 2017). The youth, including those of Western Sahara, will remain beneficiaries of the “generous” elders who have mentioned them in key policy documents such as Agenda 2063. When the African passport was launched at the 27th Summit of the African Union in Kigali, Rwanda, its first recipients were not the youth, as a sign that the continent was willing to groom future leaders, but the African elites, Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Chadian President Idris Deby Itno, who already enjoyed diplomatic privileges, until death—giving these individuals African passports thus becomes irrelevant on close inspection (Adibe 2016). These are amongst the many reasons that support the argument that AU prioritises elite interests, dwarfing any elevation of matters such as youth political participation.

In a 2011 Afrobarometer working paper entitled *The Political Participation of Africa's Youth: Turnout, Partisanship and Protest*, Danielle Resnick and Daniela Casale capture the orientation of African youth as it relates to political participation:

Our findings suggest that Africa's youth, particularly those residing in urban areas, operate in broadly similar ways to their counterparts in other regions of the world. In comparison with their older compatriots, the youth vote less and are more likely to demonstrate no partisanship or an attachment to opposition parties rather than any affinity to incumbent parties. Yet, the likelihood of their involvement in protests is not significantly different from that of their older counterparts. Moreover, we find that the youth, unlike older voters, tend to vote less the longer an incumbent party has been in office. In addition, poor incumbent performance on job creation, compared with other socio-economic issues, increases the likelihood of the youth to express either no partisanship or an affinity to the opposition. In terms of protest activity, higher levels of education and economic deprivation, as well as a lack of satisfaction with democracy, increase the likelihood that the youth will protest while demonstrating a null impact on their older cohorts' protest activities. (Resnick and Casale 2011, 2)

At the time Resnick and Casale (2011) published their paper, Africa had just experienced the youth-led uprising in North Africa that toppled long-serving dictators and authoritarian leaders. As stated in the introduction of this paper, a young Mohamed Bouazizi found

himself in circumstances that were confirmed by the studies of Resnick and Casale (2011), setting himself alight and becoming a martyr of the youth-led revolution that spread faster and had as its casualty some long-serving African authoritarian leaders. The marginalisation of the youth and the consequences thereto can be placed squarely at the doorstep of unresponsive policy environments and the “periphering” of the youth from mainstream political participation. Indeed, it is the failure of African states to engage the youth into activities that are aimed at influencing the selections, constituting the general decisions of government bureaucracy. As previously stated, the marginalisation of the youth from mainstream political participation and “periphering” the youth did not leave the youth idling. They found alternative forms of political participation at their location—the periphery. To the surprise of many, what happened with the Arab Spring and what is happening with popular urbanised protests in southern Africa, the periphery found its way into the mainstream, forcing the political elite to either capitulate and engage those that were seen as “peripherised” (Branch and Mampilly 2015).

The AU, in Agenda 2063, adopted a language and grammar that can be said to have diagnosed the danger of

peripherising’ the youth. In what can be seen as either appeasement or commitment to prevent the relapse of the popular protests, Agenda 2063 promises that “all forms of systemic inequalities, exploitation, marginalization and discrimination of young people will be eliminated and youth issues mainstreamed in all development agendas. (African Union 2016)

Although AU documents such as Agenda 2063 appear to suggest that AU and its member states are somewhat committed to bringing about real political participation, its rhetoric does not seem to be supported by credible institutional arrangements. Consider the Youth Division of the AU that is responsible for Africa’s youth agenda at AUC. The division explains that it promotes youth participation by “organizing forums and celebrating Africa Youth Day” (AU 2017). It goes further to admit that its mandate is to use the outcomes and recommendations to strengthen the youth. This is a clear indication of two things—firstly, as is the case amongst AU member states, AU understands the youth in the context of entrainment and celebration of days such as Africa Youth Day. Secondly, it is an admission that the mandate of the division is not to influence decisions but to use the outcomes and recommendation (already made) to strengthen the youth. In other words, youth are to be beneficiaries and recipients of the “generosity” of the elders. Had AUC, its youth division and member states been interested in genuine youth political participation, it would have endorsed campaigns such as *Not too Young to Run*, supported and spearheaded by UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi. This campaign aims at doing away with restrictive practices, particularly in most African countries, where state policy prevents young people from running for public office (Srouf 2016).

Conclusion—What is to be Done?

“Make the Circle Bigger”

One of the lessons to be learned from recent popular and far-reaching events spearheaded by the youth (from Arab Spring in North Africa, violent extremists in West and East Africa and popular urbanised protests in southern Africa) is that it is to the benefit of the African elite to engage the African youth and ensure that they facilitate their political participation in mainstream national politics in a genuine, inclusive and constructive manner. The African youth has proven that they do not need permission from gerontocratic leaders, and that they are capable of organising their own independent forms of political participation, often seen as destructive by those who stand to profit from an exclusive status quo. In the interest of a peaceful coexistence, African leaders must create an enabling environment for youth political participation. They must, indeed, make the circle bigger.

Linking Youth to Economic Freedom

The underlying objective of the African liberation struggle against colonialism was not only to bring about self-determination but to solve the then contractions of political power. The understanding and imagination of the liberating leaders, such as the likes of Kwame Nkrumah, was that political freedom will lead to economic freedom for the oppressed masses on the African continent. In fact, one of Nkrumah's famous phrases is one that states that: first “seek the political kingdom and the rest shall be added unto you.” The “rest” that Nkrumah was referring to is seen as the “economic kingdom.” It is now common understanding that Nkrumah's dream was not fulfilled (Mashele and Qobo 2014). This dismal failure has not left the youth idling. The youth has thus understood that the liberating generation has failed, thus making it necessary for economic freedom fighters to emerge, as it were with political freedom fighters, to fight for economic freedom (Shivambu 2014). Although the youth understand that theirs is to continue the incomplete struggle in order to deal with the remaining contradictions of economic power (the struggle started by the liberating generation), it has become impossible to pursue this struggle without confronting the very same fighters and victors of political freedom because of their positionality (Seibeb 2016). For as long as AU member states continue to define youth from the perspective of entertainment, sport, and agents of celebration during national festivals and events, there will always be conflicts between these states and the youth. As such, examples of Zimbabwe, Rwanda and Kenya, who locate the youth in the context of economic freedom—thus seeing the youth as agency of solving the remaining contradictions of economic power—must be emulated.

Appropriate African Community Outlook to Youth State Policy

In the conduct of the politics of the state, the liberating generation has often followed Eurocentric value systems or taken an opportunistic approach to the appropriation of African traditions and culture. The African political elite often resort to African tradition and practices such as respect for the elders to opportunistically escape from accountability and evade serious questions related to their political conduct. There are several African practices and value systems that remain important and can assist in bringing about youth political participation in the mainstream national discourse. One such African value system is the African outlook or conceptualisation of a community. Africans have always understood the community as consisting of (a) the dead, (b) the living, and (c) those that are yet to be born (Kamalu 2000). The dead are regarded as part of the community, although they may not be visible to everyone. They are in the ancestry watching over, supervising and protecting the living. For their part, the living play a dual role—firstly they live their lives and lead society in adherence, with regards and observation of the values and norms that the departed promoted, who are in the ancestry and part of the community, watching over them. Secondly, the living also lead their lives and society in such a way that they preserve a good community for those that are yet to be born. The community must be preserved in such a way that when the living takes their position in the ancestry, they would be watching over the new living (the present unborn) presiding over a community that they left in good shape. The African elite opportunistically turn a blind eye to this outlook that had ensured accountability and self-regulation in African traditional societies (Sesanti 2011). An individual with this outlook would be hesitant of using the collective resources for personal benefit; for he/she is cognisant of the ancestors, who are watching his deeds—even those committed behind closed doors. He/she would be bothered by the thought of one day sitting in the ancestry, witnessing the living scavenging and suffering because he/she looted and squandered collective resources. Said differently, and in the context of political participation, the African political elite would ensure political participation of young people, fearing an eye-sore for when they would be in the ancestry and those left unexposed and inexperienced take over state power without the requisite experience, as they were never given an opportunity.

Decoloniality—Reimagining Africa

Related to the above discussion is the question of decoloniality—one of the many failures of the liberating generation. The common mistake that the African elite has made over the past decades of political freedom is to think that it is only they that are concerned about the African perspective and the fight against colonialism. They concluded that the generation of youth born after independence has been influenced by western values. The African elite always sees the demands by this generation of youth as sponsored from outside, and thus concludes that the growing dissent is the artwork of

the underground “third force.” The youth of southern Africa, through popular radical protests against inequality, poverty, underdevelopment and neoliberalism, has taken the African elite by surprise once it occurred that the discontentment is homegrown and in some instances, has strong Pan-African, Black Consciousness and African communalistic values (Mabhena 2016). The demand from the state, through radical protest actions, for decent and dignified housing for all, as well as the demands for free quality, decolonised higher education—all prevalent in southern African are cases in point. The state and the African elite must consider taking the decolonial discourse in a serious light—this would include dealing with the questions of the coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being. All these questions, raised by the youth of Africa, speak to a deficit of their political participation.

Biographical Note

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