

African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, Identity, Intra-Africa Migration and Development: A Decolonial Approach

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Abstract

Migration is one of the oldest and most vexed issues globally. Migration has become a crucial subject in recent times especially in context of identity, intra-Africa migration and development. It is against this background that AU Agenda 2063 becomes relevant. Extant studies and instruments have explored diverse issues on migration, intra-Africa migration, colonialism, forced migration, migration and remittances, migration and development, and migration and identity. This is especially so within the framework of the AU and ECOWAS. However, a common thread running through all these studies, reports and instruments is the treatment of migration generically, with emphasis on its socioeconomic and political importance. Anchored on secondary method of data collection and the *Ubuntu* philosophy of communalism and interconnectedness, this article offers a decolonial perspective of ethical and philosophical notion of identity, intra-Africa migration and development within the framework of AU Agenda 2063. Findings suggest that the success of AU Agenda 2063 on identity, intra-Africa migration and integration will depend not on the complexity of its governance instruments, but on its ability to re-anchor the issues on African philosophy and ethical traditions which construct identity, intra-Africa migration and development and narrate them in contexts of African social relations, mutual collectiveness, existential interdependence and social belonging.

Keywords

Identity, intra-Africa migration, African Union, AU Agenda 2063, decolonial perspective

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Introduction

Migration is as old as humans and it has become a pertinent and vexed subject in recent times (Akanle, 2025a; Ojuri & Akanle, 2025). Migration of people is certainly a human nature and a global phenomenon. Migration is a social reality and social construct influenced by power relations, geopolitical tension, social hierarchies and subjective narratives (Triandafyllidou, 2025; Akanle, 2024; Triandafyllidou *et al.*, 2024; Triandafyllidou, 2022; Akanle, 2018). Migration has long been of interest to scholars and policymakers, especially as migration worldwide has increased, from 150 million in 1990 to 281 million in 2020 (representing 3.6% of global population) (Adebayo & Boteso, 2024; Tien, 2024). Particularly, Intra-Africa migration has served as a pillar of social and economic life for centuries as most African migrants move within the continent (Teye, 2022).

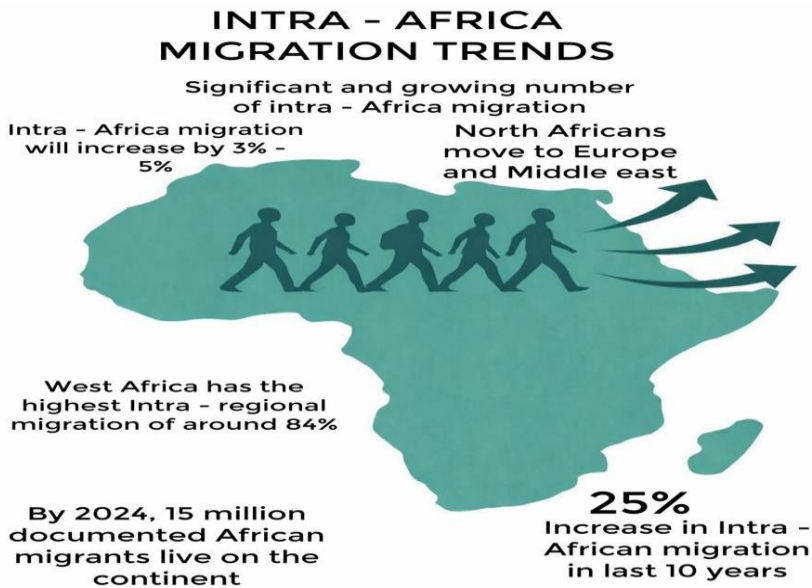


Fig. 1: Intra-Africa Migration Trends

Source: Prepared by authors. See also William, 2025; Akanle, 2025b, Morel, 2024; Tien, 2024; Selotlegeng-Mbe, 2023

Intra-Africa migration is the most profound type of migration among Africans (Akanle, 2025b). According to estimates, as at 2024, around 15 million official/documented African migrants live in African countries other than their countries of origin indicating 25% increase over the last 10 years (William, 2025; Morel, 2024; Tien, 2024; Selotlegeng-Mbe, 2023). West Africa has the highest intra-regional migration with around 84 percent of West Africans moving to, and living in, other countries in the region other than their countries of origin (William, 2025; Morel, 2024; Tien, 2024; Selotlegeng-Mbe, 2023). In

Sub-Saharan Africa, intra-Africa migration is also profoundly definitive with 70 percent to 75 percent of Africans migrating within, and living on, the continent (William, 2025; Morel, 2024; Tien, 2024; Selotlegeng-Mbe, 2023). North Africa, however, presents an exception with migration in the region being mostly inter-continental towards Europe and the Middle East. With increasing securitisation of borders and increasing anti-immigrant narratives, rhetoric and policies in the Global North (Triandafyllidou, 2025; Blitzer, 2024; Akanle, 2018), increasing Intra-Africa trades and economic relations as well as increasing flexibilisation of border crossings in Africa, intra-Africa migration is certain to increase with around 3 percent to 5 percent threshold.

Across the continent, internal and international migration share crucial overlaps and similarities. They augment one another, coexist, or proceed sequentially (Tien, 2024). Nevertheless, all migration flows constitute pertinent parts of livelihood strategies employed by thousands of households in Global South countries (Akanle & Ola-Lawson, 2022; Vullnetari, 2020; Rodrigues, 2020). Migration plays vital roles in safeguarding individual life, livelihoods, and governance systems, to the extent that failing to invest in such strategies may be antithetical to development processes (Bakewell, 2020; Rodrigues, 2020).

Intra-Africa migration remains among the most dynamic globally and this is bound to be so in the future. Major Intra-Africa Migration Hubs are South Africa (in Southern Africa) and Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria (in West Africa). There are serious issues affecting migration and governance relative to tracking issues. Many of the intra-Africa migrations are informal and this makes reliable and accurate data gathering difficult. Precise and accurate data are challenging and difficult. This creates challenge for tracking, planning and effective migration governance. Major drivers and aspects of Intra-Africa Migration are labour migration, trade, investment and search for better economic opportunities, education, social factors – like social and kinship networks - cultural factors, political factors, insecurity and conflicts and history, among others.

Migration is a core aspect of social, cultural, political, and economic sustainability on the African continent (De Bruijn, van Dijk, & Foeken, 2001). While migration rates vary from country to country and continent to continent, Africa, the youngest continent, is experiencing greater population growth than any other region globally (Williams, 2024). Projections indicate that Africa's population is anticipated to increase from 1.2 billion to 2.5 billion by 2050. Annually, 10 to 12 million African youths are prepared to enter the labour market (Williams, 2024). Although fertility rates appear to be declining more rapidly than earlier forecasts suggested, Africa is expected to maintain a substantial population of employable youth for the remainder of the century

(Williams, 2024). Due to the diverse social backgrounds of African countries and the resulting projections, the continent has experienced numerous internal and external conflicts with impacts driving migration (Akanle, 2024). The ascending rate of migration on the continent and the impacts on the continent, particularly relative to identity, integration and other socio-economic and demographic elements necessitate African Union Agenda 2063 (African Union [AU], 2015) as a panacea for realising Africa's post-independence vision of unity, integration, strong identity, prosperity, and self-reliance, which have remained largely elusive (Akanle, 2025b).



Fig. 2: Agenda 2063 and AU Vision
Source: Akanle (2025b)

Decades after independence, Africa continues to contend with splintered identities, feeble intra-Africa integration, and reliance on externally imposed development frameworks (AU, 2015). Agenda 2063 was developed as a fifty-year framework to revive the principles of Pan-Africanism, reaffirm Africa's autonomy in global governance, and establish a self-directed approach to equitable development (AU, 2015). Agenda 2063 supposedly represents a fundamental transition from externally imposed frameworks to a decolonial reconfiguration of Africa's identity, migration, and development goals (African Union, 2015). For over a decade, existing studies on African migration have covered diverse perspectives. On the one hand, some studies have explored intra-Africa migration and its impacts on the real exchange rate (Morel, 2024; Tien, 2024), kinship networks, international migration, sustainable development, remittances, and rural development (Akanle, 2025a; Ojuri & Akanle, 2025; Mbiyozo, 2024; Akanle, 2024; Akanle & Ola-Lawson, 2022; Akanle, Kayode, & Abolade, 2022; Akanle & Orobome, 2019; Ouchou, 2008;

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005; International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2008).

Extant reports and articles have also documented Intra-Africa migration (European Union, 2020), trends, patterns, and analysis of African migration factors (Adebayo & Boteso, 2024; Williams, 2024; Kanga et al., 2024; Mutava, 2023), and migration governance in Africa (Schöpfberger, Nuwe, & Ariño, 2024). However, current migration discourses predominantly exhibit an Eurocentric perspective, interpreting migration chiefly through the frameworks and dominant narratives of regulation, labour demand, border control, economic efficiency, and risk management (Castles, de Haas, & Miller 2014; Massey et al., 1993; Piore, 1979). These existing perspectives, grounded in European historical experiences of territorial sovereignty, global power relations and labour capitalism obfuscate Africa's indigenous interpretations of movement as a relational and community endeavour. In context of the AU Agenda 2063, even though scholars like Mlambo, Thusi, and Ndlovu (2022) have questioned the AU's ability to achieve its mandate, focus has predominantly been on institutional or economic aspects, with insufficient consideration of the identity dynamics, philosophical grounding and decolonial import of Intra-Africa migration. Against this backdrop, the core contribution of this article is in the re-engagement of the AU Agenda 2063 framework through a decolonial approach.

Methodology

This article is exploratory in nature, seeking to re-engage the AU Agenda 2063 and intra-Africa migration, identity, and development through decolonial approach, using secondary data gathered from learned journals, articles, reliable online sources, books and unclassified documents. Systematic literature review was conducted to synthesise existing materials in accordance with objective of the research. Data and literature utilised were obtained from Google, Researchgate, Google Scholar, JSTOR and other intellectual databases. Data and literature used included works that have objectives which align with this research objective. Keyword searches on intra-Africa migration, colonialism, identity, migration governance, and AU Agenda 2063 were conducted online and physically to identify publications relevant to the study, and those irrelevant to the focus were eliminated. A comprehensive reliability assessment was subsequently performed to evaluate the relevance of the retrieved papers for the study's areas of interest and focus. The primary objective was to achieve enhanced precision in identifying works that are related to intra-Africa migration, identity and development, and decolonial study.

Africa Migration and AU Agenda (2063) – Possibility or Impossibility

The need for Agenda 2063 of the AU is centred on the strategic importance of reflecting the continent's desire for collective prosperity and well-being, for harmony and integration, where the full potential of women and youth, boys and girls is achieved, and with freedom from pandemonium, infirmities and want (African Union, 2015). Agenda 2063 is anchored on seven goals, which are –

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
2. An integrated Africa, political harmony, based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.
3. A continent of good governance, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.
4. A tranquil and secure Africa.
5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics.
6. An Africa whose development is citizen-driven, premised on the potential of African people, particularly its women, youth and children.
7. Africa as a strong, resilient and influential global player and partner (African Union, 2015).

The first vision aims to eradicate poverty across generations by creating shared prosperity through social and economic transformation. The aim is to drive development inwardly through sustainable, long-term stewardship of its resources, prioritising Africans' high standard of living, quality of life, sound health and well-being. Furthermore, it aims to foster inclusive, educated, and skilled citizens through science, technology/biotechnology, and innovation in agriculture and the blue/ocean economy, geared towards creating a knowledge-based society (African Union, 2015). While Africa contributes less than 5% of global carbon emissions (African Union, 2015), it is worth noting that the continent bears considerable effect of climate change. Thus, the continent aim to mitigate climate change by prioritising adaptation in all actions, harnessing skills of diverse disciplines with maximum support to ensure execution of actions for the survival of the most vulnerable groups and for sustainable development and shared prosperity (African Union, 2015).

The second vision stems from the spirit of Pan-Africanism, prioritising freedom and political and economic freedom. It is inspired by a development model based on the autonomy and self-determination of African people, with democratic and citizen-centred governance (African Union, 2015). The aim is to achieve an effective integration process, which includes the free movement of people and the creation of continental institutions, leading to maximum economic integration (African Union, 2015). The third aspiration aims to achieve a common culture of good governance, democratic values, gender equality, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law.

In addition, the goal is to achieve a continent where institutions serve their citizens through effective participation in social, economic, and political development and management. The fourth goal is centred on the various mechanisms and strategies for mitigating conflicts at all levels. As of 2020, the aim was to promote dialogue-centred conflict prevention and resolution in a way that all guns will be surrendered and silenced. The vision is to encourage and nurture a culture of peace and tolerance in African children through peace education (African Union, 2015). In addition, it aims to promote stability across communities at the grassroots level through social and economic transformation.

The aspiration 5 aims to promote Pan-Africanism among Africans who share a common history, destiny, heritage, respect for religious diversity, and a consciousness of their diaspora. To achieve this goal, Pan-African ideals will be fully entrenched in all schools' curricula, and cultural assets (heritage, folklore, languages, film, music, theatre, literature, festivals, religions and spirituality) will be enhanced. The sixth goal posits that all Africans will be actively involved in decision-making and all aspects of development (social, economic, political, and environmental) at all levels. The continent shall be an inclusive continent in which no children, women, or men will be sidelined or marginalised based on gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic affiliation, locality, age, or other factors (African Union, 2015). Similarly, the vision aims to empower African women across all spheres with the same social, political, and economic rights, including the right to acquire and inherit property, sign contracts, and register and manage businesses. It aims to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence, discrimination, and harmful social practices (particularly genital mutilation and child marriage) against women and girls (African Union, 2015).

The last aspiration aims to promote a strong, united, resilient, peaceful and influential global player and partner with a significant role in global affairs. The aim is to uphold the global struggle against all forms of exploitation, racism and discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance and to defend the interests and promote the continent's international cooperation.

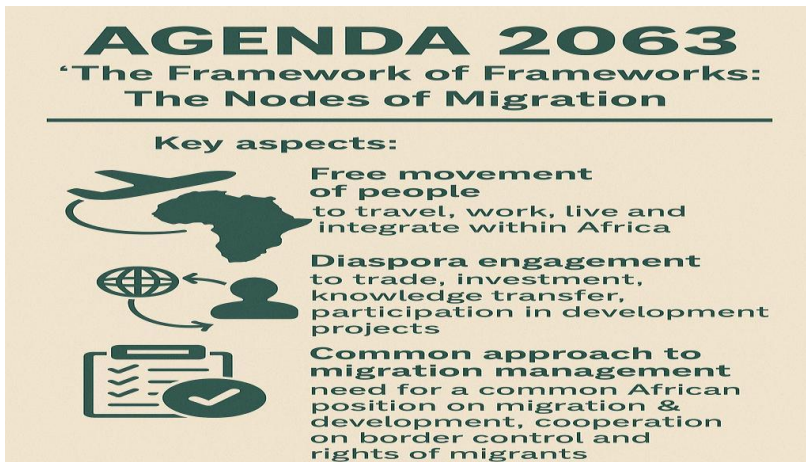


Fig. 3: Agenda 2063 – The Nodes of Migration

Source: Akanle (2025b)

While these visions seem plausible, it is worth noting that the extent to which these mandates can be achieved remains uncertain. While we cannot overlook the fact that the agenda aims to promote Pan-Africanism through the continent's effective economic integration, the philosophy underpinning this goal seems vague and utopian, particularly in the present era of globalisation, where countries are interconnected socially and economically. This raises the question of whether Africa can completely detach itself from the First World countries to achieve this pan-African ideology. Another specific challenge is on goal 4.

To effectively achieve aspiration 4, one of the most visible dimensions of the African Union (AU) reform was the establishment of the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) in 2020 as a way of responding to the multidimensional crises of the continent. However, available evidence shows PAPS capacity and cohesiveness on this mandate remain questionable (Handy, 2025; Akanle, 2025b). Even when PAPS remain the AU's largest department in terms of staffing and budget, the exclusion of the AU Border Programme from PAPS has precluded an innovative way to curb transnational and organised crime across the continent. In addition, the dissolution of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) has reduced its capacity to respond to emerging threats or perhaps made it impossible to address latent risks (Handy, 2025).

On the vision to mitigate the impact of climate change on Africans, Mlambo, Thusi, and Ndolovu (2022) posited that Africa's pursuit of stability, sustainability, and inclusive development may seem unattainable without the collective management of climate change threats. The swift climate change renders nations with constrained resources and insufficient technological expertise incapable of safeguarding themselves (Mlambo, Thusi, & Ndolovu, 2022). Yanda and Bronkhorst (2011) contend that for millennia, individuals in

Africa have adjusted to climatic change by migration and mobility, as well as by pursuing pastoral and nomadic lifestyles. Mulhern (2020) posits that climate change could affect numerous contemporary conflicts in Africa, diminish Africa's growth potential and governance stability.

Beyond the aforementioned problems, a vital issue that has also been identified is Agenda 2 on the free movement of persons. This agenda is a treaty that allows member states to move freely and reside in another member state in accordance with the host member state's regulations, and to exit that member state in accordance with the laws and procedures for exiting (Adeola, 2019). While this treaty represents a powerful boost to economic growth and development, a report from the African Development Bank reveals that, to date, this goal has not been achieved, as businesses are unable to access, move, or retain professional services, thereby restricting regional skills pooling across the continent (Akanle, 2025b; African Development Bank, 2016; African Development Bank, 2013). A critical problem is that Africans can access visas only on arrival in a limited number of African countries. However, this is not the case for North Americans, who have the liberty to travel across the continent that Africans themselves lack (African Development Bank, 2016; African Development Bank, 2013).

In a similar vein, a review of this agenda reveals that the cultural contexts and peculiarities of member states were not taken into account, particularly in orienting members on how this agenda will promote and improve their standard of living. For instance, despite continuous agitation for unrestricted movement, persistent xenophobic attacks across the continent, in South Africa for example, call for greater concern about the extent to which member states uphold this agenda. Although it is undeniable that South Africa, for instance, has faced xenophobia since its independence in 1994 (Neocosmos, 2006), the escalation of xenophobic hostilities towards individuals in the country, and elsewhere on the continent, constitutes denial of rights and entitlements of migrants. Xenophobia against African migrants on the continent has manifested through prejudice, stereotypes (Neocosmos, 2006), systemic exclusion, emotional torments and physical attacks. It is evident from provocation and acts of blatant exclusion, animosity, and aggression towards individuals solely based on their perceived 'foreign' status within particular settings. This exclusion and discrimination affect Africans as they migrate on the continent, as the designation of 'foreign' is based on the most blatant racist stereotypes. This indicates that the issue extends beyond 'foreigners' and represents a form of discrimination intrinsically linked to racism, potentially impacting any individual or group deemed non-indigenous or non-autochthonous (Neocosmos, 2006) even though they are fellow Africans.

Considering the underlying notion behind the free movement agenda, it is contradictory as it implies Africans were unfree, reproducing colonial notion of restriction. This echoes Adeola (2019) position that the trajectories of the right to free movement of individuals date back to ancient times, and the adoption of free movement in Africa predated colonial times. Worldwide, there is a general agreement that movement is part of human migratory practices (Crepeau, 2017) and rights. Historically, individuals moved in search of greener pastures. In the colonial period, mobility was mainly confined within colonial capitals and along artificially imposed borders (Adeola, 2019). However, post-independence mobility and integration reflect independent state regulation and technocracy, with permits, passports, and governance regulations that provide no or limited access channels (Adeola, 2019).

While it is possible to maintain that these measures are aimed at ensuring maximum security for member nations, it is worth noting that these strategies reflect the persistence of colonial logics in post-colonial societies. A way of transmogrifying and weakening the stronger socio-cultural bonds of African communalism and togetherness to a system of individualism or cultural ethnocentrism. The traditional notions of dominance and subjugation, which were experienced under European colonisation, have been transformed and infused into a system based on biological and structural superiority and inferiority (Quijano, 2000). As the world became new centre of power and more Eurocentric, it became a common phenomenon to judge people based on their race/countries when deciding what social class they belonged to (Quijano, 2000). In this case, we conceived it as a new form of “intra-continental relational identities” of superiority/inferiority, produced among member nations to entrench existing Western domination (Akanle, 2025b).

Theoretical Orientation

This article is anchored on *Ubuntu* philosophy. This section is therefore to engage the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is a philosophical concept originating in the Nguni Bantu languages of South Africa that epitomises the importance of humanity and communalism. The term is often translated as “I am because we are, portraying the interconnectedness and liberty of individuals within a given society (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019). The philosophy of *Ubuntu* emphasises that an individual's social identity and sense of self are deeply embedded in their relationships with others and in their contributions to the community's collective well-being (Ajitoni, 2024). *Ubuntu* is established on a set of principles and values of communalism, empathy, and interconnectedness. The core principles are that every individual has intrinsic worth and dignity and that they are inextricably linked to their society. That is, it highlights the crucial role of interdependence, subjectivism, and the emotional appreciation of human experience, rather than prioritising objectivity and rationality (Bolden, 2014). *Ubuntu* also encourages inclusivity (collectivist orientation) by expressing the value of harmony, collaboration, care, and

respect for others, and the pivotal role of solidarity in the face of challenges, for the purpose of achieving the common good (familial, social, or economic contexts) (Bolden, 2014; Ajitoni, 2024).

The above view aligns with Innocent's (2013) position that Africans believe no one is entirely self-sufficient (*uwa ezuoke*) and requires the support of others, regardless of stature or age. The person has numerous needs that he cannot meet on his own and is therefore not self-sufficient. As a result, people are obligated to live in harmony and unity and freely consented to adhere to a system (Innocent, 2013). Humans become aware of their needs and inadequacy through profound experiences as creatures. They found that, to lead fulfilling lives, they have to depend on one another. The concept of complementarity is used to overcome the difficulties posed by life's challenges. For instance, the Igbo (as an indigenous African group) way of life is based on interdependence, interrelationships, collectivism, and mutual coexistence. (Innocent, 2013).

Ubuntu is deeply embedded in inter-subjectivity, which focuses on the relationships between the individual and the collective, rather than prioritising one relationship over another. Inter-subjectivity addresses the structure-agency debate by highlighting how independent agents interact with more enduring social structures (Bolden, 2014). While *Ubuntu* philosophy has been criticised for its over emphasise on social relations at the detriment of individual connections with the physical and natural environment, however, this ideology has helped provide critical explanation on community based integration particularly how host communities imbibe the spirit of *Ubuntu*, cross-cultural exchanges, the need to treat each other with respect and dignity relatives to fair treatment of migrants, anti-xenophobia campaigns, and the establishment of border policies in tandem with a human right and fair treatment of migrants.

Rethinking Agenda 2063 through a Decolonial Lens

The African Union's Agenda 2063 aims for a politically unified continent grounded in Pan-Africanism and the concept of African Renaissance. A key element of this vision is the unrestricted movement of individuals, continental citizenship, and the elimination of obstacles that hinder African mobility. Aside from the fact that the prevailing frameworks governing migration are entrenched in colonial-era notions of borders, identity, and belonging, the ultimate question that calls for concern is the need to query the extent to which the AU has the will/the power to get member states to adhere to these visions. This also calls for concern whether the continent has visionary leaders and the zeal to implement these agendas, and whether the current system of governance practices will create the system and structure needed for these visions to thrive.

Following decolonisation, safeguarding human rights and establishing democratic governance became another pressing concern for Africa. According to Fye (2015), there is still considerable debate surrounding the idea of a democratised Africa. While some states do really protect civil freedoms and allow individuals to participate in governance processes, others are still governed by leaders who came to power following independence (Mlambo, Thusi, & Ndolovu, 2022). Often, this authority arose from political unrest that prompted military takeovers. Consequently, civil liberties and freedom of speech are non-existent in these nations (McGowan, 2003). Good governance, democratic principles, gender equality, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law are all part of the African Union's 2063 agenda, which aims to create a continent with these characteristics.

Despite this, Mlambo, Thusi, and Ndolovu (2022) contend that prevalent high rate of corruption mars the continent. African leaders are power-obsessed, and the AU recognises that it will be a significant challenge to ensure that all countries become fully democratic. While existing studies, such as Mlambo, Thusi, and Ndolovu (2022), have questioned the possibility of AU Agenda 2063, it is worth noting that migration and identity in Africa under the AU Agenda 2063 necessitate philosophical decolonisation rather than mere policy reform. We believe that existing studies have yet to probe deeper into theorising and decolonising this phenomenon. In achieving this, our argument in this section is anchored on the need to delve deeper into the issues of coloniality of borders, African mobility and identity and intra-migration from a decolonial lens.

Coloniality of Borders and African Mobility

Existing scholarly literature posited that the contemporary African migratory system is deeply rooted in colonial-era and territorial governance arrangements (Moyo, Laine, & Nshimbi, 2021). Colonialism has significantly influenced migration trends in Africa, both during the colonial era and in the post-independence period. During the colonial era, coerced migration was a prevalent practice (Aregbeshola & Adekunle, 2024). Africans were frequently uprooted from their territories to accommodate European colonisers or extensive agricultural and mining enterprises. Furthermore, colonial economies were significantly dependent on forced labour (Aregbeshola & Adekunle, 2024). Millions of Africans endured diverse forms of coerced labour, including indentured servitude and recruitment into colonial military forces (Aregbeshola & Adekunle, 2024).

Colonial administrations facilitated labour migration to satisfy the requirements of their economic initiatives. Workers from British colonies such as Malawi, Zimbabwe (previously Southern Rhodesia), and Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) were enlisted to labour in South Africa's mining sector (Money, 2019). These labour migrations ruptured traditional civilisations and produced enduring networks of movement that persisted long after the end of

colonial rule (Aregbeshola & Adekunle, 2024). Colonialism catalysed substantial rural–urban migration as colonial authorities established urban centres to function as administrative and economic hubs (Bakewell et al., 2011). Cities like Lagos, Nairobi, and Johannesburg expanded swiftly as Africans relocated in pursuit of employment prospects in colonial administration, commerce, and industry. The tendency of urbanisation persisted after independence, with former colonial cities frequently serving as the principal economic hubs of their individual nations (Aregbeshola & Adekunle, 2024).

The capricious boundaries delineated by colonial authorities frequently divided ethnic communities and created novel, artificial nation-states (Moyo, Laine, & Nshimbi, 2021; Fall, 2010). The artificial boundaries were established to regulate migration, safeguard colonial economic interests, and segregate populations, resulting in postcolonial states with inflexible territorial structures that are incompatible with Africa's historical mobility patterns (Aregbeshola & Adekunle, 2024; Moyo, Laine, & Nshimbi, 2021). The redrawing of boundaries led to considerable cross-border migration, as individuals relocated to reunite with relatives or pursue economic opportunities across newly drawn borders. The splitting prompted future conflicts, since ethnic groups separated by boundaries occasionally encountered opposition within distinct colonial areas (Aregbeshola & Adekunle, 2024; Moyo, Laine, & Nshimbi, 2021). This corresponds with Mignolo's (2000) concept of “modern/colonial world system”. Mignolo asserts that a colonial matrix of power characterised by Eurocentric hegemonic knowledge production has emerged as a result of colonialism (Mignolo, 2000). European colonisation geographically partitioned the world, established centres and peripheries, and generated "colonial difference."

Western capitalism arose and was propelled by this colonial distinction (Mertlitsch, 2016) that encompassed the concept of the 'other.' According to Mignolo and Tlostanova (2009), the issue of 'otherness' is entirely a modern/colonial concern ... 'Otherness,' as it is perceived and conceptualised today, is a Western construct originating from the Renaissance and is integral to the Western notion of 'modernity.' 'Modernity' is merely a notion and a story that emerged from and catered to colonial Western interests. To achieve the desired peace and harmony, the need to deconstruct this imaginary colonial boundary called 'border' becomes imperative. We conceptualised this within the framework of Mignolo's (2000) concept of 'border thinking'.

Border thinking pertains to knowledge and understanding, epistemology and hermeneutics, and inherently questions the dominant paradigms of knowing and constructing the world (Fellner & Kanesu, 2022). Border thinking aims to critically examine and challenge dominant and imperial epistemologies

related to racism, sexism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and ethnic hierarchies (Mertlitsch, 2016). For Mignolo, the principle of border thinking involves conceptualising through dichotomous ideas rather than structuring the world in binary oppositions. Border thinking is, in principle, a dichotomous locus of enunciation (Mignolo, 2012). In this context, border thinking is not merely a form of double consciousness but also constitutes a "double critique" because it is positioned at the intersection of the modern and colonial world systems and possesses the capacity to reflect on both. Mignolo refers to this border position as "exteriority."

This exteriority serves as the domain of non-hegemonic languages, discourses, practices, and perceptions of the world. That is why "border thinking is the epistemology of exteriority; that is, of the outside constructed from within" (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). Since what is termed the modern/artificial border/boundary system is rooted in Western, Eurocentric thought and is predominantly conveyed through hegemonic European languages, border thinking serves as a means of decolonising, an act of epistemic disobedience, and a systematic method of challenging and resisting this dominant framework of understanding and knowing the world. Therefore, decolonising migration and identity in Africa necessitates more than mere policy adjustments; it requires a profound reconnection with indigenous African values that traditionally regarded mobility, hospitality, and communal belonging as integral aspects of social existence.

Prior to the advent of colonial rule, Africans traversed regions freely for trade, pastoralism, kinship, and cultural interaction, and communities embraced outsiders through relational mechanisms of integration rather than strict legal classifications. Colonialism disrupted these traditions by establishing artificial borders and restrictive territorial identities, which now lead Africans to perceive one another as strangers (Lemberg-Pedersen, Boeyink, & Adderley, 2024). Therefore, decolonisation entails redefining identity beyond these externally imposed boundaries and reaffirming what we consider as an "Africentric" conception of belonging rooted in shared history, interconnectedness, and collective humanity. It also advocates for the reestablishment of Africa's longstanding tradition of intra-continental mobility as a legitimate and inherent practice, rather than as a security risk to be managed. By reinterpreting migration through African philosophical perspectives rather than Eurocentric territorial frameworks, the continent can foster a more inclusive, cohesive, and integrated future aligned with the objectives of Agenda 2063.

Identity and Intra-Africa Migration

The concept of identity is partially derived from Erik Erikson's theory, which posits that it reflects the ability to maintain continuity and internal coherence (Wagner, 2016). Derived from the Latin root *idem*, meaning "the same," identity is a characteristic inherent to each individual that we consider

relatively stable (and consequently the same) over time (Buckingham, 2008). Identity pertains equally to how individuals perceive and articulate themselves and others, as well as to the delineation of groups based on differences in cultural, gender, sexual, ethnic, or national characteristics, among other factors (Kahlon, 2016). Identity has become one of the crucial concepts within migration studies.

Identity has progressively emerged as a significant term in modern human and social sciences. Since the 1980s, research has rigorously examined the relationships between meanings, expectations, and conflicts associated with the diverse localities of individuals and groups; how individuals articulate their identities through various elements; how these elements can be classified; how multiple identities are intertwined and negotiated in instances of conflict, and how identities are constructed and transformed in migratory processes (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; La Barbera, 2015). The literature on this subject is so extensive that providing a detailed analysis of the various contributions in this field is practically impossible (Westin, 2010). Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to the impact of migration on identity development and transformation within the AU Agenda 2063 framework.

Migration and identity play significant role in shaping an individual's adjustment and adaptation. According to Prinz et al. (2019), the influx of a substantial number of individuals from a different culture may provoke identity issues for both the immigrants and the indigenous population. The challenges of cultural identification for both groups may intensify as the distance between the cultures increases (Prinz et al., 2019). For those affected, the alteration or even eradication of cultural identity may hold greater significance than economic consequences. Immigrants typically face two alternatives in the host country: an 'inward turn' towards group unity or an 'outward turn' towards assimilation (Karst, 1986). However, the choice of turn may depend on numerous elements, the most evident of which are as follows:

1. The cultural identification of immigrants relative to that of the host nation. The larger the cultural gap, the higher the risk of an inward shift.
2. The magnitude of the immigrant homeland community in the host country. The larger it is, the greater the likelihood of an inward turn occurring (Collier, 2013; Collier & Hoefer, 2014). This community is referred to as a diaspora (Brubaker, 2005).
3. The conditions and opportunities for absorption into the destination country's culture. The reduction of barriers and enhancement of economic opportunities increase the likelihood of immigrants' outward mobility.

Beyond the identified effect of identity on migration, the problem of race has become a significant issue affecting intra-continental migratory relations among Africans. The issue of race has reemerged in contemporary consciousness (Mbembe, 2017). The construction of racial subjects has been revitalised almost globally (Wade, 1995; Sansone, 2003). In addition to anti-Semitic racism, the colonial paradigm of likening humans to animals, and colour bias derived from the slave trade and perpetuated through segregationist institutions (such as Jim Crow laws in the United States and the apartheid system in South Africa) has transmogrified into novel forms of racism by redefining the concept of the intimate enemy within altered frameworks of animosity (Goldberg, 2002). Following a short intermission, the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have seen a resurgence in biological interpretations of differences among human groups (Duster, 2006).

Therefore, rather than eradicating prejudice, genomics has facilitated a new application of racial categorisation (Cooper, Kaufman, & Ward, 2003). Fanon (1963) averred that colonial governance ingrained hierarchies and classifications that endure post-independence. Affirming this view, Neocosmos (2006) demonstrates that African governments perpetuate colonial-era political rationalities by differentiating between “citizens” and “strangers,” thereby undermining the legitimacy of African migrants' belonging. South Africa presents a notably well-documented instance in which anti-African xenophobia is entrenched in colonial and apartheid-era identity demarcations (Neocosmos, 2006). Scholars like Mbembe (2017) contend that Africans are "colonised by borders in the mind," suggesting that national identity is defined through restrictive territorial nationalism rather than expansive Pan-African solidarities. If this intra-Africa racial classification has now become a persistent issue, to what extent can we say the vision of Pan-Africanism and one Africa is achievable?

Hence, a major issue is that African Identity is not a cut and paste subject and not a simply direct issue. African identity is a very complex and multifaceted matter (Akanle, 2025b). In context of global migration order, African identity is very complex and multifaceted for migrants and even non-migrants. The same way African identity is complex and multi-faceted is the same way Pan-Africanism is very complex, multi-faceted and, ultimately, challenging. African identity and Pan-Africanism is shaped and influenced by diverse cultural, social, historical and geographical experiences on the continent. However, African identity can be protected and preserved through language – Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, Fulfude, and so on, shared geography, colour/complexion, improved appreciation of traditional social institutions, African traditional religion, communal living, values – respect, hospitality, generosity, historical heritage, precolonial social structures and consciousness and continental self-awareness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Africa is going through complex, complicated and multiplicity of identity, migration, political, environmental and economic issues. The AU, within the framework of Agenda 2063, has set goals to address these issues so as to put the continent at the forefront of global development. While the mandate is laudable, the philosophy underpinning it is suspect and may make achievement of the goals elusive. Even when the aim is to promote Pan-Africanism, stability, and economic and cultural integration, findings in this article reveal that some of these visions are still interpreted within the purview of eurocentric and colonial philosophies and ideologies. It is pertinent to acknowledge that Pan-Africanism is not a novel ideology but a major formidable necessity and challenge. Different regional organisations and Organisation of African Unity (OAU), have attempted to drive and achieve Pan-Africanism in many different ways over the years. Yet, Pan-Africanism remains unachievable till date. Translating Pan-Africanism to reality on the continent remains a challenge and philosophical and ideological underpinning is a major cause. In context of OAU for instance, Pan-Africanism was articulated in Lagos Plan of Action of 1980. The aim was to promote economic self-reliance through industrialisation, intra-Africa trade, and reduced dependence on the West. This aim was not realised then and remains unrealised today 46 years after the Lagos Plan of Action.

In context of regional blocs, the situation remains the same. Regional policies embodied in regional blocs have also not been able to effectively aggregate and articulate achievable Pan-Africanism, Pan-African identity and Pan-African orientation. Regional blocs like the East African Community, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Organisation for Central African Community, the Maghreb, and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), for instance, have been in existence for decades, yet they have not been able to achieve, collectively and individually, well integrated Africa and Pan-African identity with positive influence of migration and development. Some strategic and pivotal issues that call for attention are: the need to inquire into the state of Pan-Africanism in this dispensation; why the Pan-Africanist spirit died; and whether member states understand the ideology behind Pan-Africanism.

These issues can be resolved through decolonial orientation moderated Pan-African identity. As long as Africans continue to desire Pan-African identity through western frameworks, orientations and philosophies, Agenda 2063 can never be achieved and Pan-African identity will be further afield. Pan-African orientations, decolonial philosophies and Pan-African relational

constructs and relations like *Ubuntu* are very much needed and should be institutionalised across continental, regional, sub-regional, national and individual orientations and mindsets.

With a series of military coups in some African states, corruption, power tussles, violation of human rights, terrorism, banditry, unemployment, xenophobic attacks, ethnic and sociopolitical crises and agitation for secession, it is evident that Pan-African identity and AU Agenda 2063 are far from achievement. Internal conflicts in member states like Sudan, Libya, the Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Nigeria, and Cameroon, for instance, are other demonstrations of weak performance of Agenda 2063 and Pan-African identity. If this conflict persists, the extent to which the mandate on African unity/stability, intra-Africa migration, and intra-Africa trade becomes achievable remains a hope in thin air. This also raises another critical question on the blueprint that the members have designed to ensure this agenda becomes achievable. This offers decolonial perspective on identity, migration, and development within the framework of Agenda 2063, which has significant normative and policy implications.

There is a need for reconstruction and redefinition of conceptualisation, narration, and ethical foundation of intra-Africa mobility and integration within continental development frameworks. "Free movement of persons" should be effectively interpreted as intrinsic ethical right grounded in a collective African identity. Reframing migration as a reinstated societal norm rather than a newly sanctioned practice would symbolically and discursively challenge the colonial presumption that African movement is extraordinary, perilous, or requires authorisation. This reinterpretation would better align with Agenda 2063, Pan-African goals, and indigenous African philosophies that view movement as a relational and ethical practice.



Fig. 4: Strategic Initiatives of Agenda 2063

Source: Akanle (2025b)

Continental integration initiatives under Agenda 2063 would be enhanced by transitioning from a mostly technocratic approach to one characterised by ethical integration. Contemporary frameworks prioritise legal harmonisation, documentation, and cooperation in governance. Although these instruments are not intrinsically harmful, their prevalence threatens to reduce integration to mere administrative compliance rather than fostering social cohesiveness. Incorporating ethical ideas and ideals from African philosophies, such as *Ubuntu*, has the capacity to re-establish integration based on values of mutual recognition, hospitality, and community responsibility. This implies that the effectiveness of integration should be assessed, not only by policy implementation rates and passport/country of origin, but also by the actual experiences of belonging, identity, movement, dignity, and inclusion among African communities.

While concerns about inter-state insecurity may arise and sometimes be used to challenge the viability of intra-Africa free movement, these insecurity problems are genuine but not inherent or limited to mobility itself. Instead, they demonstrate enduring structural disparities/failure, ecological challenges, and the degradation of indigenous value and governance systems undermined by colonial boundaries and postcolonial state deficiencies. Addressing insecurity via border closures and securitisation may perpetuate colonial paradigms of control, exacerbating the marginalisation of mobile communities. A decolonial reframing of Agenda 2063 posits that sustained stability arises not from stagnation, but from ethical integration rooted in relational governance, social fairness, and the revival of African traditions, collective identity and shared coexistence codified in orientation towards Africaness.

There is a need to decolonise the languages and terminologies used to govern and narrate migration in context of Agenda 2063. The narratives of migration persist in utilising terminologies that implicitly characterise migration as an issue to be controlled or a risk to be alleviated. Challenging and changing these western-centric narratives (Triandafyllidou, 2025; Akanle, 2018) are key to achieving Agenda 2063, particularly, in context of migration and generally in context of identity and Pan-Africanism. Challenging and altering narratives can affect institutional priorities, public perceptions, and the ethical framework of identity and migration governance processes. The vision of a unified Africa in Agenda 2063 can be enhanced by promoting symbolic and normative concepts and narratives of continental or relational citizenship that complement, rather than supplant, state-based citizenship. This approach recognises that numerous Africans already exist across various social and cultural realms and that identity development through mobility is fundamental to the construction of Pan-African identity.

Integrating relational indicators such as social cohesiveness, migrant inclusion, and decrease in xenophobia would more accurately represent Africa's comprehensive development goals and correspond with indigenous conceptions of communal well-being. Collectively, these implications indicate that the transformative potential of Agenda 2063 lies not only in enhancing regulatory frameworks but also in the ethical and epistemological reconfiguration of perceptions, constructions and narratives of migration, identity, and development. Re-centring and de-centring African ontologies and narratives of migration will provide means for more humane, inclusive, and authentically Pan-African migration, identity and integration initiative. The success of Agenda 2063 on intra-Africa migration and integration will depend not on the complexity of its governance instruments, but on its ability to re-anchor migration and identity in African philosophy and ethical tradition, which perceive, construct and narrate migration and identity as relation, mutual collectiveness, and social belonging.

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