

AFRICAN UNION AND THE CHALLENGE OF INTEGRATION IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

The international system has witnessed landmark transformations in the wake of the end of Cold War and the 9/11 attacks. Across the world, there is growing interest in the formations of supranational institutions given the inherent limitations of individual states to resolve the various challenges that confront them. Africa is no exception in this global wave of supranational institutions. The transformation from the OAU to African Union in 2001 is a high water mark in the renewed drive to entrench an enduring integration framework in the region. The evolution of the African Union has raised some questions: How different is it from its predecessor? How has the prevailing environment that circumscribed the OAU changed? How well grounded is the emergence of the AU in theoretical contexts? These are some of the questions that propelled this paper. It concludes by highlighting the need to thoroughly re-engage the conceptual and theoretical basis of integration with a view to charting a clear focus for the AU into the future.

Keywords: Integration; African Union; Supranational Institution; Globalization; International System.

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Introduction

Since the end of cold war in the last decade of the 20th Century, and the striking events that marked the beginning of the 21st Century especially the September 11 attacks, global politics has witnessed significant dramatic changes. Among these changes is the unprecedented rise in the level of transactions and interactions between and among the various actors in the international system, which ideology had inadvertently bottled-up in the super-power contestations that characterized the cold war years. It took the symbolic collapse of the "iron curtain" to uncork the forces of universalization of politics and economy which are now popularly called *globalization*. Meanwhile, the end of cold war politics, though widely perceived as a turning-point in international affairs, throws up new challenges which inevitably confront states either individually or collectively. An important aspect of this challenge concerns the relative capacity of states to minimize the costs of globalization while maximizing its potential benefits. Hence, there have been varying strands of responses to these new concerns occasioned by the fundamental re-configuration of world order. While some states found unilateral approach more attractive (where it is possible or practicable), others have embraced multilateral strategies in addressing common problems.

A noticeable response of states to the challenges posed by the new international system relates to the greater desire for the formation and/or strengthening of supranational institutions. There has been an increasing movement towards the integration of hitherto separate political units which, though a universal phenomenon, is a function of the realization that most states lack the capacity individually to sufficiently protect and defend their respective interest in world affairs.

Indeed, the European states were certainly ahead of other regions in the utilization of integration as an instrument of domestic and foreign policies. From a humble beginning as European Coal and Steel Community in 1952 and the Rome Treaty which established the European Economic Community in 1958, European States have traversed virtually all the stages of economic and political integration from the Free Trade Area, Customs Union, Common Market to Economic Union. The European Union (EU) has remained a case study in the utility and limit of integration as a tool of economic growth and prosperity. Through integration, states have access to larger markets, greater investment which stimulates economic activity, generates more employment and improves the general standard of living of the people.

As a result of the perceived benefits of integration, and following the appreciable 'success' of the European experiment, other regions of the world have imbibed the idea of supranational institution building, even if this is done with mixed results. In the Caribbean, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) comprising thirteen English-speaking former British colonies have engaged in a number of cooperative ventures culminating in what is now called the Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA). In Asia, the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN) represents the search for supranationality in that part of the world. Established in 1967 and comprising states from diverse backgrounds, ASEAN has yet to institute the fundamentals of a Free Trade Area. Nonetheless, it remains an evidence of the belief in the utility of integration as an instrument of peace and stability, growth and development.

By the same token, the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) comprising the USA, Canada and Mexico have made modest movement towards instituting the elements of supranationality. In South America, MERCOSUR has been the engine of integration among Latin American countries with Brazil, Argentina and to some extent, Chile, playing the role of core states (Aremu, 2011a). From the foregoing, therefore, the wind of integration has blown across the world.

In Africa, attempts at supranational institution building have deep historical resonance. Soon after many African states attained statehood in the 1960s, the OAU was formed in 1963. We shall turn to the politics of the formation of the OAU later. However, it is worth noting that the OAU was formed under two notable circumstances. First, was the Cold War, which had far-reaching impact in shaping the content and character of the Organization. Second was colonial rule and apartheid which shaped the focus of activity and orientation of the Organization. Interestingly, these two scenarios have since changed. The Cold War had been consigned to the waste-bin of history while colonialism and apartheid had ended. The change in the global environmental contexts generated a crisis of relevance for the Organization at the beginning of the 21st Century. This was one of the bases for the transformation from OAU to African Union in order to reflect the changing global circumstances. But the pertinent questions remain: how different the AU is (or likely to be) both in form and character, from its predecessor? In other words, how valid is the assumption that the African Union is just but an "old wine in new bottle"? And, above all, is integration in Africa premised on or propelled by any known theory or model of integration? Or is it just sailing without compass? These are some of the

questions that guided this study. In the meantime, let us attempt a conceptual and theoretical exposition of the term integration.

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Studies on integration are basically directed at addressing one fundamental question: within what environment, under what condition, and by what processes does a new transnational political unit peacefully emerge from two or more previously separate and distinct entities? This very broad and loosely open-ended objective lends the very concept of integration to varying strands of explanations. To some writers, it is seen as a 'process' (Lindberg, 1963; Pentland, 1973; Nye, 1971; Hodges, 1979) while others see it as a 'condition' (Deutsch, 1964; Haas, 1971). Indeed, neither of these groups of writers captures completely what integration is all about, a situation akin to the proverbial blind men asked to identify an elephant (see Puchala, 1972). For instance, assuming it is a 'process', what is the likely terminus or end point? Suppose it is a 'condition', at what point is it attained? Is it, perhaps, a stable or transient condition? These are some of the slippery questions that confound integrationists and confine integration theories to the realm of seemingly inscrutable ambiguity, a direct consequence of which is the emergence of different models or paradigms within the integration school. Before dwelling on some of these theoretical models, it is imperative to examine a few of the conceptions of integration.

Integration, according to Karl Deutsch (1964) could be defined as the attainment within a territory of a "sense of community" and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure for a 'long' time dependable expectations of peaceful change among its populations. Another influential member of the integration school, Haas (1971), conceives of integrations as:

...the tendency toward the voluntary creation of larger political units, each of which self-consciously eschews the use of force in the relations between participating units and groups. (p. 40-46).

In Lindberg's (1963) view, integration is the process by which political actors in the separately existing units tend to shift loyalties and expectations towards a new supranational authority. To Lindberg, therefore, integration is simply the process whereby nations subsume their capacity and desire to conduct foreign and important domestic policies under the control of a larger body. In his own contribution, Harlow (1977) defines integration

as "a process by which a group of states voluntarily and in various degrees accesses each others' markets, and establishes mechanisms and techniques that minimize conflicts and maximize internal and external economic, political, social and cultural benefits of their interaction".

Going by these conceptions, it is difficult to see any existing supranational organization that fit accurately into these conceptual frameworks. Even if one considers the EU that is often widely cited as a reference point, it is doubtful if indeed there is yet a complete 'sense of community' or a 'shift in the loyalty and expectations' to the larger center. The respective member states still exercise significant degree of sovereignty in their respective areas of jurisdiction. It is equally doubtful whether member states of the EU have considerably harmonized foreign and domestic policies to the point that is indistinguishable from the respective components units. Notable developments in the EU with respect to the adoption of a common currency (Euro) and the controversy that greeted the adoption of EU constitutions across the states as well as the approval of the European Stability Mechanism (a unified response to the global financial crises) by the parliaments of the member states reveal that even in the EU member states, forces of nationalism remain potent. Nonetheless, when ranked along a continuum, while the EU may appear closer to supranationality, Africa's integration projects appear to be quite far away.

But if conceptual tools would seem difficult to apply to most integration processes, it may be useful to attempt some exploration of theories of integration. For the purpose of this work, we will focus on four main theories: functionalism, federalism, neo-functionalism and transactionalism.

Functionalism school of integration theorizing contends that in the study of the emergence of supranational institutions, attention should be devoted to the analysis of the performance of non-political welfare functions by international organizations. The central thesis of classical functionalism is that nationalist appeals and attachment to sovereignty present a serious challenge to international peace and stability. This view is premised on the assumption that while sovereignty divides people, functional cooperation unites them into a peaceful "community of interests" (Kegley & Wittkopf, 1989). Hence, it is necessary that nation states collaborate in the performance of vital technical but politically neutral functions such as maritime, radio transmission, postage, aviation, etc. Such tasks according to Mitrany (1996) are to be delegated to group of non-political technical experts working within the framework of international organization. By this process, integration could be attained without a frontal attack on sovereignty and a direct

confrontation with forces of nationalism could be avoided. While functionalism may be applied to explaining the emergence of the EU (from the European Coal and Steel Community), neither the OAU nor the AU can be situated within the purview of functionalist theory of integration, the inherent shortcomings of functionalism notwithstanding. This is mainly because the emergence of AU (and even the OAU) is not preceded by cooperation in the performance of technical and politically neutral functions.

Another school of integration theory is federalism which, unlike functionalism, emphasizes the central role of the political elites in the integration process. The federalists support the unification of hitherto separately distinct units into a supranational entity by means of tackling the problems of social and economic diversity through programmes and project executed as a result of common political commitment made by the parties involved (Hodges, 1979). Indeed, all forms of supranational institution building require the commitment of national political elites of the integrating units. Integration by federalism seems quicker especially when there is a congruence of ideals and coalescent elite behaviour that is anchored on a strong attachment to the principle of "unity in diversity". Again, neither the formation of the OAU nor its transformation to African Union reflects that thinking postulations of the federalist school of integration theory.

For the transactionist school, it is the level of interaction among actors in the integrating unit that determines the prospects of integration process. Using transaction as the primary index, proponents of this theory contend that an intensive flow of interaction over time will ultimately propel a sense of mutual relevance between dominant political actors and this would eventually lead to the creation of larger community (Deutsch, 1953). A supranational community in transactionalists' view cannot exist unless its constituent units are interdependent and such interdependence is possible only when there is a reasonable network of mutual transactions. Hence, it is the notion of 'mutual relevance' that distinguishes a random group of individual states from an organized interdependent community. However, the transformation from the OAU to AU has not clearly and adequately addressed the critical issue of interaction and transaction among the peoples of the integrating units, the AU remains a random group of individual states, at least, by transactionalist's reckoning.

On their part, supporters of neo-functional theory argue that integration is the process by which institutions of collective decision-making evolve among a community in which there is a gradual shift of loyalty from the national to the supranational authority. Hence, neo-functionalism shares some similarities with classical functionalism but differs on the question of

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politics. Classical functionalism is anchored on the non-political approach to solving common problems while neo-functionalism engages the political factors in the process of the merging-of formerly independent states (Kegley & Wittkopf, 1989). Therefore, neo-functionalists suggest that supranational community can emerge from cooperation in areas that are politically controversial rather than by avoiding them. One of the prominent writers on neo-functionalism, Ernst Haas, conceives of integration as a process whereby politically significant elite gradually redefine their interests in terms of supranational rather than the national interests and orientation. According to Haas (1996), integration is:

...The process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new and larger center, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national states.

Going by neo-functionalists conception of integration, it is equally doubtful if it could be used to explain the emergence of the African Union. At least, it is yet to be seen whether the AU could realistically 'possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing' units. From the foregoing, it is difficult not to be persuaded by the proposition that integration process in Africa lacks a solid theoretical foundation and may have been sailing without compass.

An Overview of Integration Efforts in Africa

In the post-colonial era, there were several opinions among the various African leaders on the process, nature and form of organization to be formed (Armstrong, 1993; Agubuzu, 2004; Cervenka, 1979; Salim, 2000). The continent, soon after colonial rule, became polarized into the 'radical' and 'moderate' groups. The radical group, otherwise called the Casablanca bloc, favoured the federalist model that would have produced a political union in the mould of United States of Africa. On the other hand was the Brazzaville group which comprised mainly Francophone states which later became the Monrovia bloc when non-Francophone states like Nigeria and Liberia joined. They supported the gradualist approach that would guarantee state sovereignty while ensuring cooperation in politically less sensitive spheres (Wallerstein, 1967). The tense debate between the unionists and associationists culminated in a compromise that greeted the foundation of the

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Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in May 1963. The basic principles of the organization were set out in Article 3 of the charter. They include.

- The sovereign equality of all member states;
- Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state and for its inalienable rights to independent existence;
- Non interference in the internal affairs of states;
- Peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration;
- Unreserved condemnation, in all its forms, of political assassination as well as subversive activities on the part of neighbouring states or any other state;
- Absolute dedication to the total emancipation of the African states which are still dependent; and
- Affirmation of a policy of non alignment with regard to all blocs.

It is noteworthy, and indeed, not too surprising that the OAU charter over-emphasized the doctrine of sovereignty with a strong affirmation of the principle of 'sovereign equality of states' and 'non interference in the internal affairs of states'. From inception, member states of the organization were generally unwilling to trade-off their newly attained sovereign status on the altar of a supranational institutions, having just emerged from the strong grip of colonial rule. In terms of responding to internal crisis which engulfed many states, the OAU was fundamentally incapacitated by these provisions. By implication, the OAU was designed to be a "random amalgamation or association of states." Its subsequent failures stem largely from its inability to intervene and resolve the several internal conflicts that claimed the lives of many Africans, while generating huge refugee and humanitarian crises.

Meanwhile Africa's experiment with supranational institution building was not limited to the continental level. There were other cases in which a number of states attempted a merger into larger political units. Of these experiments, the Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union is worth noting. The Union was one of the early attempts at forming larger political units from hitherto smaller and separate entities (Olubomehin, 2003). The significance of the Union lay in the fact that it could have formed the core of further integration activities just as the Benelux states (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg) formed the core of what is today known as the European Union. Upon the departure of Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Modibo Keita respectively from power in their respective states, the union ceased to exist. This fact laid bare the limitation of integration by federalism.

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Several other unsuccessful attempts were made by Libya to merge with Egypt, Chad and Sudan at various times (Adejo, 2003). At another point, Senegal and Gambia formed Senegambia, but like others, it was short-lived. Perhaps, the only surviving example of such integration is the Union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar which is known today as Tanzania.

Beside these cases, the several regional economic communities (RECs) across the continent present other instances of integration experiments. Each of these groupings produces varying degrees of breakthroughs (see Mbaku and Saxeus, 2004). But the multiplicity of these sub-regional communities with usually overlapping membership and responsibilities have appeared more like a burden than asset to the whole integration process in Africa. Going by the AEC treaty, these RECs are regarded as building blocks of the continental organizations. They include:

- Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
- Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- Southern African Development Community (SADC)
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Although, each of these RECs faces multiple challenges, they are seen as the foundation of continental organizations. Since the emergence of the AU, it remains unclear what role these RECs would play in the entire integration matrix. Again, none of the RECs has been able to attain the rudimentary stages of free trade area, custom and monetary union much less, economic union. For the new African Union to build on this weak foundation would be tantamount to sailing without compass.

African Union and the Politics of Transformation: Old Wine in New Bottle?

The foregoing analysis suggests that Africa has a deep and varied history of integration efforts even if with limited results. The formation of the OAU in 1963, however, remained a landmark credit to the continent's Founding Fathers. The inability of the OAU to adequately deliver on its objectives and the changing international environment as epitomized by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of cold war rivalry, necessitated and indeed, compelled a review and restructuring of the organization to enable it take advantage of the rapidly globalizing world.

This is because, as Salim (2000) rightly observed, "the existing formation of individual state structures in Africa cannot cope with the dynamics of globalization". This view was equally shared by Amoako (2002) when he stated that Africa desires greater integration, not because

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"we will garner some Utopian share of world commerce, but first and foremost, because it will improve our lives. It will free up the time of African consumers, ease its plight and make him to be more hopeful". It is possible that this line of thinking had resonance in the mindset of most African leaders that responded to Muammar Gaddafi of Libya's wake-up call from the transformation of the OAU to African Union.

The process leading to the emergence of the African Union as a replacement to the OAU began at the 4th extra-ordinary summit in Sirte, Libya on 9th September, 1999 (here in after called Sirte I). The host, Muammar Gaddafi, then leader of Libya, attempted a revival of the ideas of the erstwhile Casablanca group by proposing a United States of Africa with a single leader, one army, one currency, one Central Bank and one Parliament (Agubuzu, 2004; Eyinla, 2005). Again, adherents of national sovereignty called for caution and some negotiations and compromises laid the foundation for the eventual adoption of the Constitutive Act of the African Union. The outcome of the negotiations in Sirte I was subsequently adopted in Lome, Togo on July 11, 2002 at the 5th Extraordinary Summit of the Organization in Sirte, Libya (Sirte II) where decision was reached on the establishment of the African Union. The Assembly of heads of States and Governments of the OAU decided:

- To proudly declare the establishment of the African Union by the unanimous will of the Member States;
- That the legal instrument for the Union will have been completed upon the deposit of the 36th instruments of ratification of the Constitutive Act of the African Union;
- That the Constitutive Act of the African Union shall enter into force thirty (30) days after the deposit of instruments of ratification by two-thirds of the Member States of the OAU as provided for in Article 28 of the Constitutive Act; and
- That the 37th ordinary session of the Assembly should take the necessary decision pertaining to the transformation of the OAU into the African Union in accordance with Article 33 of the Constitutive Act, and the preparation of necessary draft protocols relating to the organs and institutions of the Union.

Following the Decision in Sirte II, the necessary groundwork for the launching of the new African Union was formalized at the 37th ordinary summit of the OAU in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 2001. A year later, the African Union was launched in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002.

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Perhaps, one of the fundamental challenges to the future of the AU and the feasibility of integration in Africa relates to the question of quality leadership. The quality and commitment of the various leaders of the integrating units would inevitably determine the success or failure of any international organization. A supranational institution cannot be more than the sum of its parts. As has been argued elsewhere (Aremu 2011b), international organization can only be as effective as its member states want it to be. It follows therefore that the failure of an international organization is indeed the collective failure of the leadership of the constituting units and vice-versa. It is within this context that the lackluster performance of the OAU can be adequately understood.

But how has the African Union addressed the vexed question of leadership in Africa? Some provisions in the objectives and principles of the Union are directed at engendering a regime of good governance, transparency, accountability and democratic change of leadership. Indeed the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), a self-monitoring and assessment process, has been instituted to conduct periodic review in countries that acceded to it. It is, however, not clear whether any remarkable progress has been made in APRM especially where there are identified governmental flaws.

Another issue relates to the enforcement capability of the AU to straighten the APRM (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2005). Above all, how does the Africa union intend to tackle the question of unconstitutional change of government and sit-tight dictators that truncate and emasculate the electoral process and by implication, earning the continent a bad image in the comity of nations? (*Weekly Spectator*, December 4, 2005, p.37). For the African Union to provide the necessary stimulus to integration, and for it not to be 'old wine in new bottle,' the question of leadership in the constituent units requires adequate attention. Beside the issue of leadership crisis that had characterize Africa's political landscape, the AU requires sufficient funding to enable it deliver on its objectives. For now, only a few African states meet up their financial obligations (*Africa Recovery*, April 2002).

Conclusion

In this paper, attention was drawn to the utility of supranational institutions in generating economic development by offering large markets and investment opportunities that would guarantee better employment and improved living standards. It was established that the "groping for grouping" through integration is a universal phenomenon, and has gained tremendous global attraction particularly in the post-Cold War international system.

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Although virtually all regions of the world are engaged in various forms of integration projects, there have been mixed results. On a continuum, the European Union, barring some difficulties, remains an outstanding case of supranational institution building.

The African experience of integration reveals a variety of efforts at building large political and economic units. Of these efforts, attempt at creating a continent-wide body is an on-going exercise. However, there appears to be the absence of a clear focus for the continental organization in its integration process. Beside the apparent lack of direction, other obstacles (though not insurmountable) still confront integration in Africa. It is our hope that these challenges would be given attention by integration theorists and practitioners to guarantee a feasible future for supranationality in Africa.

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