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*African Dynamics in a Multipolar World*

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## **CONFLICTS, IDENTITY CRISIS AND THE WITHERING AWAY OF THE AFRICAN UNION: A QUEST FOR A NEW (O)AU**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the issue of conflict and identity crisis and its implications for the continuous existence of the African Union. It explains the failure of the African Union to forge unity among its members in different regions of the continent in order to forge a formidable international organization it was meant to be. The paper outlines the various possibilities available to African Union which can guarantee a virile and formidable international organization that is capable of promoting stable polity and economy within the continent and how this has not yielded any positive fruits for the African Union. The paper examines the overlapping memberships of the various regional economic commissions within the continent as veritable tools for promoting peace and stability within member states and the failure of the African Union as an organization to catch in on this, particularly with the neglect of the countries of the North and the subsequent crises that erupted therein. The paper concludes by explaining the need for the African Union to refocus and establish strong ties among the RECs or withers away and pave way for a new African Union.*

**Key Words:** Conflicts, Identity Crisis and African Union

## Introduction

The past four decades has been a turbulent one for the continent of Africa. The existential degeneracy and crisis in African social systems over the last four decades has generated extensive debate in the literature on the structural and psycho-cultural factor sustaining the quasi state of anarchy in these countries. The conflict triggers highlighted include issues of identity, nationalism, social structure, nation-building and an anarchic and virulently hostile international environment. There is no gainsaying in the fact that Africa has cornered the attention of the international community in its efforts towards resolving the complex emergencies that enveloped the continent since the mid 1980s. These complex emergencies were created by the depth and duration of economic decline, coupled with ecological degradation, political paralysis and institutional decay<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, individually and collectively, African countries have not been able to transform their society into a development-oriented society despite the enormous national and natural resources at the disposal of these countries. In other words, the failure of the countries of Africa to take advantage of their economic and social background to position and reposition themselves within the comity of nations, as demanded at different periods, in the international system is responsible for their relegation and stigmatization as the 'dark continent'. Needless to say that deep political and economic failures are the root causes of the Africa's problems.

The prevalence of wars and conflicts in Africa makes the issues of integration and development arduous challenges on the continent. The United Nations, African Union and many

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<sup>1</sup> Lubek, P.M. 1992."The Crisis of African Development: Conflicting Interpretations and Resolutions". *Annual*

<sup>1</sup> Deng, F. and Zartman, I.W. 1991. *Conflict Resolution in Africa*, Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institution.

sub-regional organizations are engaged in development projects in Africa. However, the states in Africa have continued to receive negative affinities such as failed states, rogue states, weak states, sleeping states, and so on. It is now apparent that meaningful integration cannot be possible without establishing the interface between politics and economics. Contrary to the idea of the functionalists, it is pertinent for political and economic institutions to interact and interrelate in order to establish functional social order rather than isolating political factor from economic and social institutions in the bid towards integration as the functionalists would want us to believe. This partly explains the problem confronting the AU as an organization.

As the successor to the Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU), which was created in 1963 to eliminate the last vestiges of colonialism in Africa, the African Union (AU) came into existence in July 2002 at the Durban heads of states summit with the more focused goal of propelling African states towards peace and prosperity as the basis for achieving the ultimate goal of political and economic integration of its member-states. The AU was modeled on the European Union with structures that included an Assembly of heads of state/government. The transition from OAU to AU was clearly intended to transform the institutional framework for realizing the pan-African vision and mission from what some critics regarded as a mere 'talking shop' to an action-oriented forum<sup>2</sup>. However, achieving this objective by AU seems difficult in the face of current happenings in the North of Africa and the failure of the organization to play the expected role in salvaging its conflict-bedeveled member-states.

The recent uprising in the North of Africa tagged 'Arab Spring' and the unending conflicts on the continent of Africa, particularly in Somalia and Sudan (and recently in Mali), is an indication that all is not well with the continent of Africa. Prior to the 'Arab Spring', it is

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<sup>2</sup> Mudasiru, S.O. 2009. "Peace Before Development: ECOWAS Peacekeeping Operations and Conflict

difficult to ascertain or believe that there are other states in Africa who are member-states of the AU beyond the states in the sub-Saharan Africa. Discussion about Africa is usually centered on the sub-Saharan Africa. This is to the extent that several negative affinities are used to describe the politics, economics, culture and society in this part of the world. For about three decades, the continent was enveloped by both inter-state and intra-state conflicts of different dimensions that overwhelmed the capacity of the OAU (later renamed AU). At this time, it was believed that the sub-Saharan Africa is the major problem of the continent and therefore, the sub-Saharan Africa is the jurisdiction of Africa Union as it attracted the attention of the organisation and that of the international community. However, the recent uprising in the North of Africa changed this assertion that membership of the AU transcends the countries in the sub-Saharan Africa. It is obvious that the African Union did not play its expected role in the North African uprising. This may not be unconnected with the failure of the countries of North Africa, with the exemption of Libya under Ghadaffi, to identify with the African Union.

The main thrust of this paper is to understand the rationale behind the failure of the AU to establish its presence and control in the conflict situation in the North of Africa. In a bid to do this, the paper attempts to identify the relationship between the AU and the states in the North of Africa (Arab Nations) in order to understand the passive role of the AU in the 'Arab Spring'. The paper relies heavily on the views of scholars and the perception of individual writers in this area. In a nutshell, content analysis shall be used throughout this paper, both in terms of opinions, criticisms and comments.

### **Conflicts and Identity Crisis in Africa: Theoretical Issues**

Africa has been in deep and persistent malaise since the mid 1980s. It is by far the least developed economically, and the most conflict-prone politically. In policy-making circles and media characterizations, it is 'the hopeless continent'<sup>3</sup>. Such pessimism is driven in part by the failure to manage - much less resolve - the destructive consequences of multiple violent conflicts<sup>4</sup>. The problem of violent internal conflict in Africa is acute. It has been judged to be 'the most warring region on the planet'<sup>5</sup>. This is not to say that conflict do not occur in other parts of the world. Searching through the World over, conflict seems to have become part and parcel of activities of both human and non-human beings. While it may be difficult to resolve conflicts among non-human elements in the world, the management of conflicts should not pose problem to human beings because of the unique nature of this elements compared to non-human elements. However, attempts to ensure that conflicts are minimized in the interactions of individuals and states alike in the international arena seem to be posing problems. While conflict is not peculiar to a particular region or state in the international political system, the dimensions of these conflicts vary from region to region and state to state. As a matter of fact, the pre-1648 Europe was known more for activities of wars and conflicts. However, the Treaty of Westphalia brought end to these.

In the same manner, the current phase in Africa should not be seen as a new phenomenon in world activities. What have become worrisome in the conflict situations in Africa are the perpetuality, unprecendential nature and the threat it poses to international peace and security. As observed by Tony Addison and others, the last four (emphasis mine) decades have seen many

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<sup>3</sup> The Economist May 13-19, 2000

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, R. 2007. "Violent Internal Conflict and the African State: Towards a Framework of Analysis"

<sup>5</sup> Van Tongeren, P. 1999. "Introduction" in Mekenkamp, M., Van Togenren, P. and Van der Veen, H. (eds.)

civil wars and *coups d'etats* in Africa, but the last twenty (emphasis mine) years have seen a disturbing escalation in the violence<sup>6</sup>. In other words, the magnitude of conflicts in Africa is incomparable to any other continent in the world thereby depriving the continent of meaningful initiatives and projects towards development despite its richness in natural and human resources in the world.

Events in the international arena have also had its role on the conflict situations in Africa, especially with the turning of events and developments in the World at the end of the Cold war. After the eclipse of the Cold War, the site of political conflicts seems to have undergone relocation from the international arena, with a large inter-state concentration, to the local or national fronts. In most parts of the World, ethno-political conflicts are threatening to tear many states apart. From the Soviet Union to Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa, intra-state conflicts have shown resurgence. Between 1989 and 1998, of 108-armed conflicts in the World, only seven were inter-states<sup>7</sup>. The fallout of the Cold War and the democratization process in most parts of the Third world unleashed various local forces and reactions, which have implications for conflicts and stability in these countries<sup>8</sup>.

It is interesting to note that the humanitarian problem this has created in Africa is highly unprecedented. This has made scholars from different background to turn Africa into epicenter of conflict thereby using the continent as a unit of analysis in developing theories of conflict. Historically, Africa may have lagged behind Europe in terms of technology. However, long before the coming of Europeans to the continent, Africans possessed social and political philosophies as valid as those of their European counterparts. These systems revolved a

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<sup>6</sup> Addison, T. Philippe Le Billon, and S. Mansoob Murshed, 2001. "Conflict in Africa: The Cost of Peaceful

<sup>7</sup> Wallenstein, P. and M. Sollenberg, 1999. "Armed Conflicts and Civil Wars in Africa" *Journal of Peace*

<sup>8</sup> Adejumobi, S. 2001. "Citizenship, Rights and the Problem of Conflicts and Civil Wars in Africa" *Human Rights*

universal recognition of human worth which formed the spiritual foundation of African societies<sup>9</sup>.

Following the end of the Cold War, Africa became a theatre of violent conflicts from Burundi to Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Sierra Leone, Somalia to Rwanda and Guinea to Sudan. The indelible mark of the new wars is that they are linked to identity, particularly ethnic identity. While there are many identity markers such as race, nationhood, kinship, class, religion, language, gender, age, geographic location, cultural preferences, and occupation - such as military function or herders and tillers - by and large ethnicity is identified as the dominant axis about which conflicts have revolved. Three arguments have been made to explain the new patterns of violence.

To begin with, this violence is seen as senseless or a return to barbarism<sup>10</sup>. With the emergence of pluralist democracy, this violence has been seen as a ploy by the incumbents to undermine democracy and perpetuate themselves in power<sup>11</sup>. Thirdly, some scholars view the explosion of ethnic-based violence in countries like Rwanda as a manifestation of the brutal legacy of manipulation of ethnicity in the colonial past now returning to haunt the post-colonial state<sup>12</sup>.

Trying to make sense of this violence, Kaldor<sup>13</sup> argues that the new conflicts are not wars in the modernist sense between states or organized political groups for political ends. Rather, they are connected with the resurgence of identity politics after the collapse of the Berlin wall. In this regard, primordial identities have pursued claims to power within the arena of the modern

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<sup>9</sup> Kochalumchuvatti, T. 2010. "The Crisis of Identity in Africa: A Call for Subjectivity" *KRITIKE*. 4(1), June, 108-

<sup>10</sup> Mamdani, M. 2002. Making sense of political violence in postcolonial Africa. *Identity, Culture and Politics* 3 (2),

<sup>11</sup> Kagwanja, P. 2001. Politics of marionettes: Extra-legal violence and the 1997 elections in Kenya, in Rutten, M.,

<sup>12</sup> Mamdani, M. 2001. *When Victims become killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda*.

<sup>13</sup> Kaldor, Mary 1999. *New Wars and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Cambridge: Polity Press.



nation-state. The ubiquity of identity wars is based on the fact that ethnic identity is indeed particularly strong in traditional societies - embodying the deeply embedded sense of belonging to a group with unique identity markers, such as myths of common ancestry, shared memories, cultural values, traditions and symbols, and ownership of territory<sup>14</sup>.

However, the accent on ethnicity as a cause of conflict is problematic in at least two ways. First, ethnic identity does not sufficiently explain communal wars. Some homogeneous nations like Somalia have been engulfed in civil war while many heterogeneous societies live in peace, as Osman argues in this issue<sup>15</sup>. Further, the so-called African traditional identities are often recent constructions, either by colonial powers or by their post colonial successors, resulting in mythologies of Africanist cultures<sup>16</sup>. Why then has the ethnic identity become so combusive?

Attempting to account for the implosion of ethnic-based violence, Arjun Appadurai<sup>17</sup> linked the preponderance of identity conflict to the forces of globalisation, noting that ethnic violence is deeply rooted in the uncertainties, anxieties, disillusionments and chaotic environments created by economic globalisation. Africa's new wars neither corresponded to Frantz Fanon's<sup>18</sup> 'humanizing native violence' against an equally violent colonial state nor to Hannah Arendt's<sup>19</sup> 'dehumanizing' state violence against its citizens typified by the Nazi Holocaust or, more

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<sup>14</sup> Endalew, T. 2002. *Conflict Resolution through Cultural Tolerance: An Analysis of the Michu Institution in*

<sup>15</sup> Osman, Abdulahi 2007. Cultural Diversity and the Somali Conflict: Myth or Reality? *African Journal on Conflict*

<sup>16</sup> Banégas, R. 2006. Côte d'Ivoire: Patriotism, ethnonationalism and other African modes of self-writing. *African*

<sup>17</sup> Appadurai, Arjun 1998. Dead certainty: Ethnic violence in the era of globalization. *Public Culture* 10 (2), 225-

<sup>18</sup> Fanon, Frantz 1967. *The wretched of the world*. London: Penguin.

<sup>19</sup> Arendt, Hannah 1975. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

recently, ethnic cleansing in the now defunct Yugoslavia. The violence is non-revolutionary and 'non-liberative'.

When they came face to face with this new form of violence, many analysts understood it as a new trend by the leaders of the one-party vintage to resort to recruiting surrogates and clients to organise violence against rebellious citizens. Mohamed Salih<sup>20</sup> unveiled how the Sudanese state recruited tribal militias to terrorise civilian populations in a move that contributed to the 're-tribalisation' of politics. The use of tribal authorities as agents of political violence became widespread in countries as diverse as Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa.

Nevertheless, this violence was more complex than simply being one-way violence by the state against its citizens. Intellectuals and publics used the term 'nationalism' to describe the sensibilities and violence linked to culture, ethnicity, religion and other negative forces of society<sup>21</sup>. As the historian Eric Hobsbawm has noted, nationalism in the new age has acquired a reactionary character in contrast to that of the emancipator nationalism that was associated with wars of liberation from colonial imperialism across the world.

Bruce Berman<sup>22</sup> christened this new form of nationalism as 'uncivil nationalism', largely because it is about identity politics and sensibilities or contestation for power on the basis of identity labels. In this regard Kaldor<sup>23</sup> concludes that the 'new wars' that have ravaged Africa lack 'geographical or ideological goals of earlier wars' and are largely 'internal or civil wars'.

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<sup>20</sup> Salih, M. 1989. New wine in old bottles: Tribal militias and the Sudanese state. *Review of African Political*

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, R. 2004. A definition of peace. *Peace and Conflict. Journal of Peace Psychology* 10 (2), 101-116.

<sup>22</sup> Berman, B.J. 1998. Ethnicity, patronage and the African state: the politics of uncivil nationalism. *African Affairs*

<sup>23</sup> Kaldor, Mary 1999. *New Wars and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Yet, these new patterns of violence are not simply 'internal' or civil wars as Kaldor and others posit. They are part of 'regional conflict complexes' or formations that link local and global spaces, revealing the ugly underside of globalisation. Ethnic militias, combatants or bandits feed into 'economies of war' which are inextricably connected to globalised illegal economic networks and contrabands in precious metals, gemstones, drugs, guns and human trafficking.

At another level, these wars are not simply about war economies. They are also linked to complex proxy wars involving regional powers. The war in Somalia, for example, has also come to be linked to the longstanding conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, with both protagonists underwriting and backing rival forces within the country. Moreover, as the case of America's involvement in Somalia allegedly to rout out the Union of Islamic Courts' fighters shows, what are viewed as internal wars are also linked to the 'clash of civilisations' which now defines the parameters of the global 'war on terrorism'. This broad context must be borne in mind when seeking durable solutions to the emerging culture of ethnic violence and state failure.

### **Regional Integration and Its Implication for Development in Africa: From OAU to AU**

The urge for a united, continental political action has been an enduring issue in the development quest in Africa. Right from the first Pan-African Congress that was held in 1919 in Paris, which attracted representatives from Africa colonies, the Americas and the West Indies, to the fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945, a congress that not only domesticated the notion of Pan-Africanism but also inspired nationalist liberation agitations, the reoccurring theme is Africa's emancipation and the imperatives of development<sup>24</sup>. It is important to point out here that the quest for Africa's emancipation started before the quoted 1919 when the

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<sup>24</sup> Adejumobi, S. and Olukoshi, A. 2009. "Introduction: Transition, Continuity, and Change" in Said Adejumobi

first Pan-African Congress was believed to have held in Paris. Pan-Africanism has a rich history dating back to the 18th century, coming from the new world rather than Africa itself. Prince Hall, a black cleric in Boston, campaigned unsuccessfully in 1787 for help from the state Assembly in returning poor blacks to Africa. He was followed by Bishop McNeil Turner who established the American colonialism society<sup>25</sup>. However, the naked scramble for Africa, after the 1884 Congress in Berlin, gave new urgency to the Pan-African response. In 1886, George Charles, President of the African Emigration Association, declared to the United States Congress that his organisation planned to establish a United States of Africa. Consequently, Pan-Africanists convened their own Congress in Chicago in 1893. In 1900, the first Pan-African Conference was convened in London by Henry Sylvester Williams, a lawyer from Trinidad. In the first half of the 20th century, the twin giants of Pan-African Movement were Marcus Garvey and W.E.D. Dubois. Dubois organised another Pan-African Congress in Paris in 1919 to coincide with the Versailles Peace Conference, hoping to persuade the world leaders that the principle of self-determination should be applied to Africa as well<sup>26</sup>.

In the 1920s Dubois organised three more Pan-African Congresses, but the main impetus of Pan Africanism by the 1930s in America was cultural. In 1945, the fifth Pan-African Congress was held under Dubois. The most fundamental change at that time was that the torch of Pan-Africanism had in reality passed on to new generation of Pan-Africanists from the continent of Africa itself - to men like Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta. Nkrumah became the voice and organising force of Pan-Africanism. In the 1940s and 1950s he promoted the idea of an independent West African federation, as first step towards a United States of Africa.

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<sup>25</sup> Adejo, A. 2001. "From OAU to AU: New Wine in Old Bottles" AJIA, 4(1), pp. 119-141.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pg. 129

When Kwame Nkrumah led Ghana to independence in 1957, he inspired Africans resisting colonialism and seeking freedom all over the continent. His firm conviction was that national independence was not enough and he spent much of his energy pursuing the possibility of a united Africa. In April 1958, he organised the first Conference of Independent African States - attended by Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Sudan. The Conference declared a policy of non-alignment in world affairs and decided to coordinate African policies on international political questions.

The second conference of independent African States was attended by 13 countries and they included the Provisional Government of Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan Tunisia, UAR, and Cameroon. Participants expressed deepseated ideological differences regarding the form African Unity was to take<sup>27</sup>. However, despite the basic disagreements and numerous inter-state squabbles, independent African states maintained a façade of unity until the last half of 1960 when a number of unrelated events led to the formation of competing political alliances. Some of the most important developments included Nigeria's attainment of independence, which challenged Ghana's claim to leadership; Morocco's quarrel with Tunisia over Mauritania's right to exist as a separate sovereignty state; the accession of thirteen francophone African states to independence and their being accused of failing to oppose France's policy on Algeria and sending African troops to combat FLN in Algeria, support for western policies, the signing of defence pacts with France and their opposition to Patrice Lumumba in the Congo<sup>28</sup>. The most fundamental development which widened the emerging rift among African states was the Congo problem and the rise of competing alliances.

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<sup>27</sup> Legum, C. 1962. *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide*, New York, Fredrick Praeger, pp. 45-47.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 48.

In October 1960 in Abidjan, Ivory Coast a number of Francophone African states held a conference (although Guinea, Togo, and Mali were absent). The conference tried to formulate direct negotiation between Algeria and France and recognised the right of Mauritania to full independence. In 1961 they established the Africa and Malagasy Union (UAM).

The formation of the UAM led to the establishment of a radical alliance at Casablanca in January 1961 where Ghana, Guinea and Mali sought to escape isolation in the face of the moderate alliance of Francophone states. It held a conference, supported Patrice Lumumba, and enunciated its radical proposals for African unity in a 'Casablanca Charter'<sup>29</sup>. As a countervailing force the moderate alliance was enlarged at a meeting held in Monrovia in May 1961. It now included Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Togo, and 12 UAM members. By the time of the summit Conference in Addis Ababa in 1963, where the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was created, the Casablanca Group had become relatively weak, while the moderates were clearly in the majority to push their agenda. A preparatory Conference of African Foreign states held on May 15-23 was charged with the formulation of plans for the establishment of the OAU. A Committee constituted for this purpose studied a variety of proposals including the Casablanca Charter, the Lagos Charter, Nkrumah's plan and a draft charter prepared by the Ethiopian government, the host country. The Committee encountered great difficulty in effecting a compromise because the Casablanca charter reflected the ideal of political union while the Monrovia group advocated a more conservative policy. While Nkrumah could obtain support for his radical position from the Casablanca Group, there was strong opposition to the idea of an African Union from the Monrovia group, which included the

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<sup>29</sup> Zartman, W. 1966. *International Relations in the New Africa*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc,

Francophone bloc. This group, led by imperialist propaganda, insinuated that the radical Casablanca group was communist inspired.

Unfortunately, the fear of opposition in various African countries had helped the capitalists to play up the crises of subversion as the instruments of the radical group. The division placed serious obstacles on the path of African cooperation. However, the heads of African states were determined to approve a charter, which became a compromise charter signed on May 25, 1963. At this time hardcore radical states were Algeria, Ghana, Mali, and UAR. Thereafter, it was clear that the composition of the ideological bloc was not stable and some of them managed to maintain two foreign policy positions simultaneously.

Interestingly, the purposes and objectives of the OAU, as stated in Article 11 of the Charter, included the following:

- To promote the unity and solidarity of the African states;
- To coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve better life for the people of Africa;
- To defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity and independence;
- To eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa and to promote international cooperation, having due regards to the Charter of the UNO and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To this end, the member states agreed to coordinate and harmonize their general policies especially in the following fields: political and diplomatic cooperation, economic cooperation including transport and communication, health, sanitation and nutritional cooperation; scientific and technological cooperation, and defence and security cooperation. Among the cardinal principles of the OAU, an aspect which has allowed for uncomplimentary remarks on the OAU

in the last four decades, were the issues of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states (which is most un-African) and the inherited colonial borders remaining sacrosanct.

In the OAU, as analysts observe, several groups of states sharing similar values on a wide range of issues interacted with one another along the lines of a classical multi-polar balance-of-power type of international system. Equally, the organisation could be likened to the post-Napoleonic concert of Europe in some respects as it worked for the preservation of existing political systems and borders in Africa either by direct action or inaction. At independence the leaders were in no position to undertake serious development initiatives because they were too engrossed in the struggle for survival and the need to cope with the many problems threatening their countries and their power.

Nevertheless, the organisation continued to exist even though its critics had dismissed its existence and predicted its possible collapse. Each time it convened, its critics predicted that it would end in disarray and collapse. However, the organisation proved its critics wrong. It has been a successful organisation, as evidenced by its impressive achievements in the objectives it set for itself<sup>30</sup>. To begin with, a major objective of the OAU was the eradication of all forms of colonialism in Africa. The organisation ensured that by 1990, at the end of the war of liberation in South Africa and Namibia, all African countries ruled themselves. This marked the end of colonialism and racist rule in Africa.

Secondly, all but one of the 54 African countries were members of the OAU up to the time of its transformation into the African Union (AU). This is an indication that the goals of decolonization and unity, which the organisation set for itself, had been achieved. Apart from

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<sup>30</sup> Mwangi, S. 2001. "From the OAU to AU: The Experience, Promise, and Expectations" in Said Adejumobi and



this, the organisation provided a common platform and unity to the member states, which enabled them to acquire a voice, although still a weak one, in the international community.

However, in the economic field, it has not been that easy for the organisation to achieve its main objectives. The organisation achieved part of its commitments. Its leaders recognized the economic challenges facing Africa and were determined to address those problems. At the level of economic integration, cooperation, and development, there emerged over the 40 years (under OAU) several regional and sub-regional economic groupings reflecting an acceptance of transitional, state-led economic cooperation or integration, involving the pooling of common resources in response to shared problems and opportunities<sup>31</sup>. This led to the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) by the Assembly of the Heads of States and Government of OAU in 1980. The LPA and the Final Act of Lagos were raised as a central idea of "collective self reliance" of the continent. This idea was strongly reinforced by the Abuja Treaty of June 1991, establishing the African Economic Community (AEC), which sought to increase economic self reliance and to promote an endogenous and self-sustained development<sup>32</sup>.

It is important to note that the efforts put in by the organisation to establish economic cooperation, even though with collaboration with such organisation like the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), proved abortive. Although, this was not acceptable to some scholars as total failure by the organisation. As observed by Mwangi, the combined efforts of the OAU and ECA to establish pan-African economic arrangements have produced mixed results<sup>33</sup>. Some specialized arrangements, such as the African Development Bank (ADB) and the

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<sup>31</sup> Agubuzu, L. 2002. *From OAU to AU: The Challenges of African Unity and Development in the twenty-first*

<sup>32</sup> Mwangi, Op. Cit.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Association of African Central Banks (AACB), managed to survive, but other schemes failed even to take off.

The OAU's inability to enhance the economic well being of Africans resulted in its unpopularity. At the dawn of independence, the people of Africa had hoped for strong, united egalitarian and prosperous states. Their hope, however, was dashed and remained unrealized due to a chain of five related and mutually reinforcing factors. These factors include (a) bad governance resulting from mismanagement, (b) political instability and conflicts, (c) economic retardation, (d) aggravation of poverty, and (e) the HIV/AIDS pandemic<sup>34</sup>. Thus, as the OAU wound up, Africa was the poorest continent in the world in spite of being the most richly endowed in terms of natural resources. The social, economic and political crises that ravaged the continent during OAU' reign are attested to by the fact that Africa accounts for half of the world's refugees, while a substantial percentage of people who live with HIV/AIDS are from the continent, needless to mention the millions who still die of malaria, cholera, and similar preventable or curable diseases<sup>35</sup>.

The fact that the organisation made as one of its key principles not to interfere in the domestic or internal affairs of member states made it difficult to articulate and analyze the problems facing each and every member states in their respective countries. The effect of this principle was decreased commitment to the idea of pan-Africanism. Hence, member countries concentrated their efforts on the establishment and setting up of micro-nationalist organizations in the sub-regions and the pursuit of narrow national institutions at the expense of continental interest. The idea to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states contributed to the impunity with which leaders in member states run the affairs of their countries without

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

regards to good governance, peace and development. They made the OAU weak so as to maintain sovereignty for the states they ruled. Therefore, the weak position of the OAU and the evident incapacitation of the organisation made sub-regional organizations to gain ground and occupied the space that would have otherwise been created for the OAU.

The ground prepared for AU to take off was therefore a turbulent one with enormous problems and challenges. Hence, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU declared at their summit in September 1999 in Sirte, Libya, to rename the OAU to AU. The transition from OAU to AU effectively began on May 26, 2001; one month after Nigeria deposited her instrument of ratification of the act on April 25, 2001. This gave the requisite two-thirds majority for entry into force of the formation of the AU. The transition from the OAU to the AU was consummated at the 37<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Summit of the OAU in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 2001, when the formation of the organisation was announced and the plan of its implementation adopted.

This launching, as optimists argue, was indeed a fitting climax of decades of concerted efforts by generations of African leaders and peoples for continental unity. The OAU had served its mission and was due for replacement by a structure geared toward addressing the current needs of the continent, regarding social and economic development in particular.

It is important to note that the AU has a vastly expanded mandate from that of the OAU. It includes the principles contained in the OAU Charter, as well as the goals entrenched in the Abuja Treaty regarding social and economic development. In addition, it reflects a greater openness and willingness to be mutually scrutinized and assisted in areas such as human rights. Added to this is the need to establish a structure that can deliver on the expanded mandate<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

However, the extent to which AU has been able to achieve these objectives, among others, requires serious and open discussion.

### **AU, Regional Organisations and the Arab Nations: The Challenges**

The current socio-political and economic atmosphere in the world dictates the need for strong regional integration and strong country for effective competition within the global environment. What obtains in the European Union (EU) is not an ordinary organization that seeks the integration of its member for social activities. Rather, it is an organization that strives to promote the socio-political, economic and cultural development of its member states. Regardless of the geo-political situation of the countries of the EU, the nationalist orientation of member states indicates a union that sets out to provide succor for its member states in all ramifications as at when due. This has been exhibited in different ways, particularly during the economic meltdown which saw the countries of Greece, Italy, Spain and others crumbling and being bailed out by the EU. This shows the implication of having a strong integration and union. In geo-political terms, Africa is divided into five natural regions: West; East; North; South and Centre. Apart from this, there were seven Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) at the end of 2006 and seven International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) with regional dimensions<sup>37</sup>. In West Africa, alongside the ECOWAS, encompassing all the 15 countries of the sub-region, there is the *Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine* (West Africa Economic and Monetary Union - UEMOA), consisting of eight ECOWAS member states - all French-speaking with strong links to Paris. There is also the Mano River Union, consisting of three ECOWAS member states (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone).

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<sup>37</sup> Square, I.K. 2007. "Regional Integration in Africa: The Case of ECOWAS" in Bhekinkosi Moyo (ed.) *Africa in*

In East Africa, there is the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), whose seven members states come from the Horn of Africa and the northern part of East Africa. There is also the Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL), consisting of three members of the economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) which consists of eleven members across Central Africa. Still in Central Africa, there is the *Communaute economique et monetaire des Etats d'Afrique central* (Central Africa Economic and Monetary Union - CEMAC), the identical equivalent of UEMOA in West Africa, comprising six French-speaking ECCAS countries. The East Africa Community (EAC) is not in reality purely East African, but made up of COMESA members: Kenya and Uganda and a SADC member, Tanzania<sup>38</sup>.

In Southern Africa, there is the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), whose fourteen members consist of all Southern Africa. But there are also two other economic communities: the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), consisting of five members of SADC and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), made up of four members of Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and Reunion (which is still, strangely a French dependency). The 20 countries that make up its membership include all East African countries except Tanzania and seven countries of Southern Africa<sup>39</sup>.

In North Africa, there is the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), consisting of the six North African countries (except Egypt) with close links to the Arab League. There is also the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) whose 18 member states transcend four geographical regions, feeding its ranks from all the five regions of the continent except East

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Africa, with countries such as Libya (North Africa), Mali (West Africa), Chad (Central Africa) and Swaziland (Southern Africa) very active in it<sup>40</sup>.

A cursory look at these regional organizations in Africa reveals that most of these RECs had sophisticated treaties and protocols guiding their activities which are quite similar in forms and contents. Most of them had well-functioning secretariats and they conducted frequent meetings at the summit, ministerial and technical levels<sup>41</sup>. Apart from this, each of them had short term and long term goals ranging from customs unions (for example, CEN-SAD and SACU) to full economic unions (for example, SADC, ECOWAS, ECCAS, UMA, CPGGL, UEMOA) and cooperation on diplomacy, environment and trade (for example, IOC)<sup>42</sup>.

In addition to the above, it is also noteworthy that the RECs cut across geographic regions. This shows that some countries have overlapping memberships of the RECs. This has been pointed out by the Economic Commission of Africa in its comprehensive report about regional integration in Africa. According to ECA, of the 54 (53 AU members + Morocco) African countries, 26 are members of two RECs and 20 are members of three. One country (the Democratic Republic of Congo) belongs to four RECs. Only six countries (Algeria & Mauritania (UMA only), Malawi & Mozambique (SADC only) and ECCAS members Sao Tome & Principe) maintain membership in just one Regional Economic Community<sup>43</sup>.

The activities of these RECs ought to have transformed into positive steps for the AU in its quest for integration and economic development. However, the persistence of armed conflicts in different zones on the continent prevented this transformation. By 2001 when the OAU was transforming to AU, there was wide belief that the Continent only had the conflicts in Somalia

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Report, 2004. Pg. 30

<sup>42</sup> Souare, I.K. 2007. Op. Cit. pg. 224.

<sup>43</sup> ECA Report, 2004. Pg. 40.

and Sudan to confront with, with sketches of crisis and violence in few other African countries. Several key messages were conveyed by recent conflict and conflict management trends in Africa. The first is that regional and sub-regional organisations are an integral part of the design and implementation of conflict management norms and strategies on the continent, and are becoming increasingly more proactive in this regard. Second, the incidence of large scale armed conflict between and within states, which pose a threat to international peace and security, is on the decline as African states continue on the path of democratic transition and the strengthening of regional norms in the next decade. Third, international policy responses in the area of conflict management are still heavily focused on short term measures, which consist largely of military approaches such as developing the capacity to plan and execute peace support operations at regional and continental levels<sup>44</sup>. As envisaged by Olonisakin that the gradual reduction in major armed conflicts in Africa, with major concentration in the conflicts in Darfur and Somalia, there is the tendency to undermine what she refers to as "youth bulge", a surging youth population creating pressures for jobs, education and health, many of whom survive on the fringes of the state. The Arab spring was a crisis situation established by the youth beginning from Tunisia in December 2010.

The series of protests and demonstrations across the Middle East and North Africa has become known as the "Arab Spring" and sometimes as the "Arab Spring and Winter", "Arab Awakening", or "Arab Uprisings" even though not all the participants in the protests are Arab. It was sparked by the first protests that occurred in Tunisia on 18 December 2010 in Sidi Bouzid, following Mohammed Bouazizi's self immolation in protest of police corruption and ill

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<sup>44</sup> Olonisakin, F. (2007). "The Future of Conflict Management in Africa" Paper presented at the Discussion on the

treatment<sup>45</sup>. With the success of the protests in Tunisia, a wave of unrest sparked by the Tunisian "Burning Man" struck Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, and Yemen, which later spread to other countries. As of February 2012, governments have been overthrown in four countries. Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011 following the Tunisian Revolution protests. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak resigned on 11 February 2011 after 18 days of massive protests, ending his 30 years presidency. The Libyan President, Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown on 23 August 2011, after the National Transitional Council (NTC) took control of bab al-Azizia. He was killed on 20 October 2011, in his hometown of Sirte after the NTC took control of the city. Yemeni President, Ali Abdullahi Saleh signed the GCC power-transfer deal in which a presidential election was held, resulting in his successor Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi formally replacing him as the president of Yemen on 27 February 2012, in exchange for immunity from prosecution<sup>46</sup>.

In all this, it is important to stress that African Union was helpless as the turbulent protests charged the Union to issue signal to member states to consider the revolution as an indication to commit themselves to the vision of the Union. According to the Chairperson of the Union, Jean Ping, while addressing the Assembly of Heads of State and Government at the AU Summit in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, urged the African governments to recommit themselves to the AU's democracy agenda. Unfortunately, the Union could not take any drastic step in mitigating the effects of the protests. This may be difficult for the Union as the protests were considered as popular movements towards entrenching democracy in erstwhile authoritarian states. However, the Union failed to recognize or appreciate the implications of the protests for its passive activities in this region of the continent. In the first instance, the protests explicate the

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<sup>45</sup> [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



inaction of the Union in ensuring common identity among its members as a continental organisation. Second, even though the Union is confronted with the conflicts in Sudan and Somalia at this point in time (and recently the uprising in Mali), it is obvious that the Union lacked the political will to stop the protesters as most of the leaders in these countries had enjoyed the support of the Western Nations to entrench their authoritarian regimes and autocratic rules. The African Peer Review Mechanisms of the African Union and indeed the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance never considered the countries affected by the revolutions as part of its members so as to extend its searchlight of democracy on them prior to the spring.

As noted by Karl Deutsch, groups of countries would integrate or come together to form unions when they are confronted with a common threat (such as the devastating inter-state wars in the case of Europe)<sup>47</sup>. Although in Africa's particular circumstances there is no history of bloody inter-state conflicts, there is nonetheless the combined scourge of poverty, unemployment, hunger and disease. Arguably, the devastation and misery caused by these conditions surpasses that experienced by Europe in the two World wars and should, therefore, suffice as a motivating factor or catalyst to bring African countries together to seek common solutions to the problems that afflict their people<sup>48</sup>.

Therefore, one of the major challenges facing the AU is integration. A major criticism of Africa's cooperation and integration under the OAU was that the pursuit of this noble goal was almost of exclusive responsibility of governments and political leaders, whose practice of unquestionable solidarity among themselves and noninterference was not conducive to the realization of the goal. The process of African cooperation and integration was not sufficiently

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<sup>47</sup> <http://ghananewsagency.org/11584>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

people-oriented, and most African governments were so occupied with the problem of political survival as to allow the people to take part in any integration process. The existence of RECs failed to transform into positive development, cooperation and integration for the continent. Most of Africa's functioning interstate organizations are sub-regional, rather than regional. These have evolved in response to specific needs and requirements of member states. There has neither been any attempt to establish formal liaison mechanism among and between them and the continental organization nor has there been any systematic analysis of how sub-regional organization could be effectively integrated or rationalized<sup>49</sup>. More importantly, most countries do not want to dismantle those economic groupings, not even the small states, either because of the substantial or marginal benefits they derive from them, or given the specific historical contexts and experiences that informed the formation of those RECs and the attachment of member states to them overtime.

Inter-state trade activity is one major area that the AU ought to have employed to enhance its integration. European integration began with the joint production of coal and steel, and with time spilled over into cooperation in other sectors including security and defence. However, in Africa, the manufacturing base is almost nonexistent but this deficiency can be turned into opportunity if African governments, under the umbrella of the AU, unanimously declare an industrial revolution and work collectively and consistently towards its realization. At one of their meetings in Sirte, Libya, in July 2009, AU leaders rightly emphasized the need for increased collaboration in the agricultural sector as the continent's way out of the current global food insecurity and economic crisis. Committing more resources to agriculture would not only enable them to make food available for the teeming population, but would also generate jobs for unemployed if pursued with the requisite commitment and consistency, devoid of lip service.

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<sup>49</sup> Mwangi, Op. Cit. pg. 36

Today in Africa, the volume of intra-African trade stands at about 15 per cent, as against 45 per cent trade with Europe. The particular issue of concern here is the prevailing terms of trade between Africa and the developed world which have been far from favourable to Africa. The hue and cry across the Continent about the Economic Partnership Agreements between Europe and Africa is not for nothing. It is the view of many that the world's wealthy nations would be seen as true development partners if they would support Africa countries to industrialize their economies and set them on the path of sustainable development rather than dole out aid money.

Agriculture is one area that could provide a springboard for the much needed activation of the RECs, and the heightened level of economic cooperation that has so far eluded the continent. African countries could begin integrating their economies in the agricultural sector since they are all essentially agrarian. The adoption of a strategy similar to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which would place emphasis on joint action in agricultural production and agro-processing, would provide logical starting point<sup>50</sup>.

Apart from the challenges mentioned above, it is important to stress that the essence of integration for any organization is for its people to come together and identify with one another in a manner to establish substantial connection and provide easy access for them within the jurisdiction of the integration. This is not the case with Africa. Today, intra-African movement is one of the most difficult to make for people within the continent. While it is possible for citizen of Africa to move freely in Europe and America, including Asia, it is not so possible for these citizens of Africa to move within African countries. Obtaining travelling documents, particularly visas of African countries by African citizens has been difficult, if not impossible, for these

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<sup>50</sup> <http://ghananewsagency.org/11584>.

citizens. This explains why intra-African trade is very low compare to trade between Africa and other continent, especially Europe.

Therefore, integration that is not people-oriented cannot stand the test of time. Unfortunately, the political leaders of the countries in Africa have been indifference to the plight of the citizens because it allows them to continue their authoritarian and despotic rule. In addition, the lack of political will by the AU in enforcing and implementing some its policy decisions within the continent is what some of these leaders enjoy to promote their misrule and autocratic tendencies in the atmosphere of democracy. No wonder the third wave of democratization in Africa has been described in some quarters as authoritarian democracy. Ostensibly, the African Peer review Mechanism (APRM) of the NEPAD has become a laughing stock among the people of the world as the instruments has failed in correcting bad governance within the continent. With the APRM in place, the AU failed to point out the misrule in the countries of the North until the uprising in the North of Africa tagged the 'Arab Spring'.

The failure of the AU to resolve the conflicts in Somalia, Darfur, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and currently Mali shows that the organization has lost its hold of the continent hence the need to have a new African Union or Organization of African Unity that is capable of uniting all the 54 African countries.

## **Conclusion**

Although it is possible to view the AU as an organization that is still young and has a long way to go, it is necessary to point out that the existence of the AU start from the formation of the OAU. There is no gainsaying that the AU missed the point from the beginning and this

culminated in its unpopularity. Up till today, most citizens of Africa do not identify with the existence of the AU.

The impediments confronting the Union are both internally and externally generated. The dilemma posed by the dichotomy between state sovereignty and regional integration should not be overlooked. This should be considered mutually exclusive and which should be separated. The post-Westphalian ideology of rapid response approach to conflict should be paramount in the AU's idea of conflict resolution. The rapid response approach of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and ECOWAS gave them the success stories in those countries or region where they have intervened to resolve conflicts.

The over reliance of the AU on ECOWAS for countries within the West African region is also an indication that the AU lacks the wherewithal to intervene in conflicts situations within the continent. There is no gainsaying in the fact that the lack of political will of the AU has continued to strip the organization of the courage and determination to put an end to conflicts on the continent.

It is therefore not out of place to seek for a new African Union or a renewed Organization of African Unity that will take into cognizance the need for the people of the continent to relate and interact socially, politically, economically and culturally without any hindrance. African countries should work on the need to have common market and currency which will promote easy access in terms of trade and culture across the continent.

Also of importance in the quest for a new AU or OAU is the question of external support from Europe and other parts of the developed world which presents a double-edged sword for the continent. The exclusive support of a 'godfather' in the African scenario on the basis of past colonial ties has continued to create zones of influence which could only exacerbate the

prevailing trend of dependency and division on the continent. One fact remains that the godfather syndrome serves as a great disincentive to the continent's integration agenda. To a large extent, it is responsible for the low level of trade and cooperation among African countries and the ineffectiveness of the RECs.

It is important to consider intellectual interest in Africa's integration process. The theorizing and scholarly debates that characterized the evolution of European integration, and which served to refine the process, contributed in no small measures, to its success story. This is completely absent in Africa's case.