

The 50 Years Struggle of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU): A Search for a Developmental Paradigm in Africa?

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ABSTRACT The year 2013 marks the centenary since the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on 25 May 1963.¹ While the 50th anniversary of the OAU is a cause for celebration in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), the body's birthplace and home of its successor, the African Union (AU), the occasion prompted much reflection amongst historians and political scientists alike. The study attempts to scrutinise the history of the OAU in the 50 year struggle for African unity. Furthermore, study interrogates the historical impact of the OAU in its endeavors to bring political stability on the African continent. In this study the challenges and successes of the OAU in a 50 year period are highlighted in view of the current socio-political problems as experienced by the African continent. In this 50 year period, it became clear that this organisations primary aim of uniting all African countries was elusive and imaginary. Furthermore, it is argued in this study that the development paradigm that the OAU envisaged became difficult to be realised. On the basis of the findings of this study, recommendations are made on how this organisation can continue promoting cooperation amongst the African countries rather than unity.

INTRODUCTION

When the OAU was founded in 1963 the population of African continent was 314 million and in 2013 it was approximately 1 billion. During the same period of the founding of this organisation, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was \$ 135 billion and \$ 985 billion in 2013. The average life expectancy was 41 years in 1963 and 57 years in 2013. The number of OAU/AU member states was 32 in 1963 and 54 in 2013. Without doubt the above statistics shows remarkable changes in a 50 year period of the existence of the OAU.

Although the African leaders at the founding conference of the OAU 50 years ago were divided over the kind of organisation they envisaged, with the radical bloc led by Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah favouring total economic and political unity for the continent, and the more conservative majority seeking a gradualist approach, they soon united in support of decolonisation and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.

It should be noted that the governance institutions and practices that were bequeathed to a majority of African states at independence were, for most part, ill-adapted to the African realities and the continent's development challenges. At the continental level, African leaders had first, through the OAU and later through its

successor, the AU, been concerned about various facets of the continent's governance challenges. For the pioneer OAU, its initial governance focus was on the elimination of the last vestiges of colonialism in order to promote the principle of self-determination and to foster the establishment of truly sovereign states, free from all forms of external interference, both continentally and globally. The study is important in investigating the achievements and challenges of the OAU over the past 50 years and how that impacted on the development of the African continent. Furthermore, arguments are advanced in this study as to whether the OAU promoted the idea of developmental states to the African independent governments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Through the use of primary (sources) such as OAU/AU publications and secondary sources such as periodicals, books, chapters in books, peer reviewed papers, and newspapers, the researcher will address the issue of the challenges and successes of the OAU/AU. A qualitative research method has been employed with much emphasis on the narrative and analysis approaches. The analysis will focus, for example, on whether or not economic, political, and social factors had stymied the OAU/AU efforts to Africa's unity.

Literature Review

The formation of the OAU and its impact on the socio-political history of Africa has generally been the domain of historians. In their studies of the OAU, historians often looked at the cooperation between the countries rather than emphasizing African unity. The literature on OAU is replete with conceptual categories that describe the various stages of the organisation and the resistance to colonial rule. Amongst the foremost scholars on OAU are Ajayi (1972), Smith and Nöthling (1993), Smith (1981), and Mazrui and Tidy (1987). Although there were some measures of agreement on the conceptual categories, scholars hold divergent opinions on the role of OAU and whether can it be classified under the rubric of 'nationalist movement'. These viewpoints generated a debate in the historiography on the role of the OAU. This study analyses the challenges and successes of the OAU over a period of 50 years. The researcher attempts to achieve the above mentioned aim, the uses recent publications in providing a convincing and thought provoking analysis of the role played by the OAU on the African continent. Subsequent to that, the AU as the successor of the OAU is also scrutinised. In order to fully understand the role of OAU on the African continent, for the purpose of this study information on its formation is important.

A Brief History of the OAU

As previously mentioned, when the OAU was formed, it aimed at eliminating any form of colonialism on the African continent. A key objective of the organization was to defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the independence of member states. Members also pledged to respect and promote one another's inalienable right to independent existence and to refrain from interfering in one another's domestic affairs, including any engagement in subversive activities against each other (Shinkaiye 2006: 3). Contrary to the euphoric hops of the peoples of Africa, the removal of the imperial yoke did not usher in an era of peace, stability and socio-economic progress. Since 1960, the watermark year of Africa's independence, the African region has been plagued by conflicts and widespread destruction of life, limb and property.

The formation of the OAU was never an exercise without friction. Since its formation in 1963, the OAU proclaimed to the world its commitment and competence as the primary agency to intervene in African conflicts. Legum succinctly stated '... it is difficult to imagine what might have been the fate of Africa if, at the dawn of emancipation from foreign rule in the early 1960s, its leaders had failed to provide the deeply balkanised and politically divided continent with a political center (Legum 1975: 208-219). What follows are some of the views regarding its formation in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in 1963.

The Divergent Views on the Formation of the OAU

In their book, *Africa North of the Limpopo: Africa since 1800*, Smith and Nöthling (1993: 442) argued that 'African independence had a specific significance for Pan-Africanism. Many nationalist leaders were Pan-Africanists who were strongly inspired by its anti-imperial and anti-colonial stance, and they promoted the movement after independence had opened opportunities for the realisation of their dream of continental unity.' It should be noted that the issue of African unity became the central thesis of the established OAU. Although to some historians the establishment of the OAU was seen as the step in the right direction, however, there were divergent viewpoints on its significance and whether it will be sustained amidst the challenges experienced by many African states in the late 1950s and the early 1960s.

Nkrumah, strongest supporter of Pan-African nationalism, placed more emphasis on the political unity embodied in a united states of Africa. This approach by Nkrumah was challenged by some of his contemporaries who had other thoughts on the unity of Africa. For example, some were dubious about such a close form of unity and gave preference to a loose federal structure while a third group favoured a gradual regional form of cooperation which the predicted would eventually end in a more permanent form of unity (Smith and Nöthling 1993: 442). Nkrumah advocated Pan-African unity as a guarantee against what he defined as neo-colonialism or the continued economic dominance of Africa by foreign or the former colonial countries. Ajayi (1972: 513-527) claimed that the nationalist idea was introduced into Africa before

partition and remained essentially an abstract concept but sustained by racial consciousness.

Adeke (2012: 67) argues that from the above analysis by Ajayi, it was clear that the objective of modern nationalism was completely different from that of primary resistance. A different class of Africans was also involved in the two movements. Primary resistance was led by the traditional ruling elite who struggled against a change in the status quo while modern nationalism was led by a new class of educated Africans with a vision to the future. Therefore, Ajayi traces the roots of African nationalism and the subsequent formation of the OAU to the emergence of this new class.

The formation of the OAU emanates from the notion of African nationalism. In his book, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, Coleman (1971) presents a representative sample of three categories: primary resistance to the imposition of colonial rule; post-pacification or secondary revolts against administrative actions, including nativistic or messianic movements; and modern nationalist movements which struggled for self-government.

Moolakkattu (2010: 152) stated the following about the formation of the OAU:

Like many regions, Africa also had a Pan-African organization created in 1963, thanks to the unflinching commitment of some first generation post-colonial leaders. The 'federalist school', as they are sometimes called, represented by figures like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana essentially wanted a big bang transformation of post-colonial Africa in order to optimise the potential benefits of a united region, including the tapping of the continent's abundant resources. It was also grounded in the belief that such unity was necessary to end the persistence of neo-colonial linkages with the former colonial masters.

Differences on African Unity

Although in some quarters of the African continent the issue of African unity was welcomed as a viable attempt to promote African solidarity, the establishment of the OAU worsened the enmity amongst some of the African countries. The OAU was established in an era of strife because in 1963 alone, three governments fell to coups, namely, in Benin, Congo-Brazzaville and Togo. The year 1963 was also

when open fighting started between Kenya and Somalia in the so-called Shifta War which continued for four years. Equally, the AU, too, was created with war raging. In the decade it was constituted, there were civil wars in Côte d'Ivoire and Chad, ongoing conflicts in Darfur, wars in the Niger Delta and the Central African Republic, and any number of border and ethnic skirmishes. The above challenges threatened the envisaged African unity.

During the 50 year period of the existence of the OAU, the independent states all confirmed their opposition towards colonialism, imperialism and racism as well as to the French nuclear tests in the Sahara. They also decided to create an organisation for African economic development and to work towards closer educational, cultural and scientific bonds (Smith and Nöthling 1993: 445). Despite this, fundamental differences existed with regard to unity. Ghana and Guinea made a strong case for a political union based upon the Sanniquellie Declaration, but the other delegates were cool about this. Nigeria, not only branded the idea 'premature', but warned against leaders who aspired to lead the continent to constitutional unity. This remark was obviously aimed at Nkrumah, who had made himself available for this role during the first All African Peoples' (AAP) Conference in 1958. Most leaders were not willing to sacrifice their newly attained political power (Tordoff 1984: 228). The French-speaking states relied on the mother country for their security, capital, skills and markets. The differences on African unity led to the establishment of the Brazzaville and Casablanca blocs.

DISCUSSION

The Challenges of the OAU in the Unity and Development Processes

As previously mentioned in this study, 50 years ago, the OAU was established in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia with the aim of uniting all African countries. Under the OAU, African states became the main custodians and instruments for norm-building in Africa. Notwithstanding its limitations, the OAU Charter provided useful prescriptions which established a normative regime for continental behavior. The concepts of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of mem-

ber states inherent in the Westphalian tradition to this day continue to provide legal and norm-setting reference points in Africa as well as the continent's relations with other actors in the international system (Adar et al. 2010: xix). Despite the above, the OAU had some challenges which to a certain extent compromised its successes. Underneath are some of the challenges.

Pursuing Free Trade at the Expense of African Unity

In 1991, members of the OAU agreed to the Treaty of Abuja, which created the framework for the realisation of the economic part of Nkrumah's vision of a united Africa. The treaty was agreed to in a period of great optimism after the release of Nelson Mandela and the imminent end of apartheid in South Africa. It was also the period of 'high globalisation' between 1990 and 1995 when there was a universal acceptance that the creation of a truly global economy was both possible and realisable and all would benefit. The treaty was to start a process of integration that would lead to a copy of the European Union (UN) model. It would involve, first, a free trade area and then a customs union, which would lead to monetary union and a single African currency, and all by 2023 (Grynberg 2013: 8). It recognised that Africa had already embarked on regional integration and that continental integration would have to be based on regional economic communities (RECs). The treaty recognised eight such communities, including the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC), the Common Market of East and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The OAU's and AU's Inefficiency in Peacekeeping Missions

Since de-colonisation of Africa, the power struggle within and between African governments had resulted in civil unrest and interstate warfare. These conflicts had been the target of peacemaking and peacekeeping initiatives of the Western powers, the United Nations (UN), and neighbouring African states.

Temple (2009: 1) argues that the EU had found regionalism to be a preventative solution to conflict. After two world wars, European states

used economic interdependence and political integration to establish the EU as a forum to negotiate and mediate issues across the table instead of on a battlefield. This attitude strengthened the EU in Africa at the expense of the African establishments such as the OAU/AU. Some of the failures of the OAU/AU in dealing with these challenges were the question of financial resources. If peacekeeping was to broker peace through compromise between opposing parties, is it within the interest of member states that are the subject of peacekeeping measures to contribute state funds to the AU Peace Fund? This was strengthened by governments such as Sudan and Morocco objecting to the intervention of UN peacekeeping forces while inviting an AU peacekeeping mission (Temple 2009: 1-2). With the above, it was not clear as to whether the AU peacekeeping was more acceptable because of its African origin, or was it because of its widespread record of lame-duck peacekeeping missions that offer little threat to the offending governments.

Academics and policy makers alike appear to have written off the OAU as an effective instrument of conflict management and the maintenance of peace and stability in the Africa region. The OAU evolved as a compromise solution to the ideological disputes and divisions which dogged African states at the initial stages of systemic relations. From 1959 to 1963, independent Africa was split into two ideological camps. There were the 'unionists' which advocated immediate political union of African states, and the 'statics' which denounced any precipitate union, preferring, instead, a loose form of association of independent African states, based upon the principle of functional cooperation. In 1993 the OAU established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (MCPMR) for mediation purposes. The MCPMR's mandate was 'to bring to the process of dealing with conflict in our continent a new institutional dynamism, and ultimately resolve conflicts when and where they occur' (Adar et al. 2010: xx). The MCPMR mandate was superseded by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) once it became operational in May 2007. However, the OAU's role in conflict resolution and collective security in general did not go beyond the strict adherence to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.

At the inception of the AU in 2002, the continent was ridden by a wave of conflicts in the Mano River Union (embracing Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia); Cote d'Ivoire; Sudan; Somalia; Zimbabwe and the Central African Republic. Therefore, crisis and political turmoil inspired by the conflicts threatened violence, anarchy and disorder.

Accelerating Democratic Momentum of the African States

Matlosa (2010: 11) contends that: 'Promotion and protection of human rights in a democracy therefore clearly suggest that democracy (not authoritarianism) is a fundamental prerequisite for development and stability throughout the world. The converse is also true; namely that undemocratic governance (authoritarian) breeds mal-development and instability'. With the end of the Cold War, issues of democracy, human rights and good governance gained unprecedented prominence. This process, aligned with increasing domestic pressure for democratisation within Africa itself, generated an increased propensity among African leaders within the OAU to adopt a proactive posture on the question of good governance on the continent.

According to Shinkaiye (2006: 5), the OAU decisions, declarations and resolutions in the 1990s, tended to underline popular participation and good governance. These included the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development (1990); the Declaration on the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World (1990); the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community; the Grand Bay Declaration of the OAU Ministerial Conference on Human Rights; the Sirte Declaration (1999); the Solemn Declaration on the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) of 2000; the Lomé Declaration on Unconstitutional Change of Government (2000) and the CSSDCA Memorandum of Understanding (2002). Furthermore, Shinkaiye (2006: 5) argued that in this context, attitudes towards democracy, human rights and good governance became more forthright.

Despite the above, as early as 1997 the Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni denounced the OAU as 'a trade union of criminals'. He was also blunt about his vision for Africa; including short shrift for rapacious dictators and the formation

of wider political and economic federation to give the continent more clout on the world stage. He appealed to the countries of the SADC to halt their plans to form a common market until they could embrace the countries of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Museveni urged the Africans to stop blaming colonialism for all their ills (Kanhema and Fabricius 1997: 6).

In 2012, a human rights activist Alioune Tine of Senegal claimed that the problem with the OAU/AU member states was that of bad governance. Tine led a protest against Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade's bid for a third term. Wade refused to withdraw from the presidential race until he dismally lost during the polls on 25 March 2012. As the leader of the African Assembly for the Defence of Human Rights, Tine had since 1990 mobilised against abuse of power, torture and censorship of the media. He argues that the African continent should create institutions that could not be manipulated (Louw-Vaudran 2013: 27).

The Successes of the OAU

Currently there is a school of thought that says African states will be forced to unite to achieve the economics of scale necessary to compete in the global economy. However, this global integration comes with the risks of interdependence. At this point, the continent can boast neither strength nor unity. In order to compete, Africa requires internal trade, investment in the skills and technology that can make it more productive, an end to conflict and a reduction in overall military spending, and united policy-making at a global level. For individual countries, that means giving up at least a portion of their sovereignty. The following are some of the OAU/AU's successes:

Pushing for Human Rights in African Diplomacy

Since its establishment, the OAU has been preoccupied with human rights, as evidenced by the struggle for the decolonization of Africa and the right to self-determination and independence. Embodied within this, no doubt, was the fact that those agitating and fighting for independence used human rights standards to justify their struggle, as colonialism had no regard

for the human rights of colonized people. It should be noted that the struggle for human rights and the establishment of a human rights system are products of a concrete social struggle. In 1997, the OAU's Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim issued a statement that the organization should regain the upper hand in its battle to become more relevant in an era of democratisation. Salim enjoyed the support of the new African leadership which was involved in shaping the future of intra-African diplomacy. Furthermore, he argued that since its formation, the OAU had made some strides in its approach to human rights issues and despotic rule (Seymour 1997: 8).

Emphasis on the Continent's Economic Freedom

Smith and Nöthling (1993: 462) argued that the OAU went one step further in 1969 when the African group at the UN became strong enough to make its voice heard in the world body. This was also significant for the UN's economic policy in which the Africans demanded a more decisive say in economic policy. The OAU was made a partner. Later the OAU issued an Economic Charter emphasising the need for economic independence in 1973. This document augmented the Charter of 1963 which set down the political base upon which the organisation intended to function, accepting the desire for economic independence and emphasising the need for economic cooperation as the base for stronger unity.

Recently, the AU's chairwoman Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma offered an optimistic and realistic assessment of the AU at the Pan-African Parliament by stating (Fabricius 2013: 13):

Our continent is once again infused with a sense of optimism and unimaginable opportunities, with a number of positive indicators and trends. The positive economic indicators included Africa's rising working-age population, expected to reach 1.1 billion by 2040... Investment in Africa had increased from 15.9% of gross domestic product in 2000 to over 22% in 2012.

The above statement by Dlamini-Zuma was commendable. Many analysts queried whether the growth rates were sustainable or not because they were mainly based on exports of commodities and this commodity boom was gradually

fading. Some argued that the risk of instability and violence was likely to persist and even increase in some instances. One analyst Jakkie Cilliers, Director of the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa stated that in order to have economic stability, the AU needs to emphasise peace on the African continent (Fabricius 2013: 13).

Non-recognition of Governments that Seized Power by Coups

Since the founding of the OAU, coups continued in most of the African states, for example, 22 in the 1960s; 24 in the 1970s; 22 in the 1980s and 28 in the 1990s. It was in the 1990s when the OAU's patience snapped. In 1999 it decided to suspend governments that seized power by coups. When the OAU transformed itself into the AU in 2002, it built on a new charter demanding democracy, human rights and good governance and the right of the AU to intervene to prevent gross human rights abuses by members (Fabricius 2013: 13).

CONCLUSION

When the OAU was founded in 1963, several of the founders considered ties between themselves as a survival strategy in a world torn between two superpowers. The following 50 years proved that none of their motivations or justifications held water. The continent remained deeply divided along lines ranging from ethnicity to class, with only marginal movement towards integration. Founded in the midst of the Cold War and before globalisation, the OAU thought geopolitically, with military might at the forefront. In an analysis of the types of policies created by the OAU and its successor, a group of researchers found that prior to 1980s, 40% of the organisation's work was dedicated to peace and security. In the decade from 2001, the number of policies dedicated to that section of the AU's work declined to just 16%. This was an indication that the focus had shifted to social and economic issues. What followed after the founding of the OAU was indeed a post-independence history of too much politics and too little social and economic development; a narrow focus on decolonisation to the exclusion of much else, including democracy. Over the next half-century, power was to change hands 108 times through

coups and much less often through democratic elections. The founding father of the OAU Nkrumah himself was toppled in a coup in February 1966. Constrained by a policy of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, the OAU did little to curb abuses by member governments for many years. The above paper showed that the OAU/AU had some challenges as well as achievements in a 50 year period of its existence. However, it remains to be seen as to how the organization will fare to achieve a new developmental paradigm in the next 50 years.

NOTE

1. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) changed its name into being the African Union (AU) on 9 July 2002 in Durban, South Africa. For the purpose of this paper the two names will be used interchangeably

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