

REGIONALISM IN AFRICA: COOPERATION WITHOUT INTEGRATION?ⁱ⁾

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ABSTRACT

The 'idea of Africa' implies pan-Africanism, that is, a united Africa, working in concert towards a better future for a continent consisting of one billion people and 54 sovereign independent nation states. Since decolonisation, regional integration was proclaimed as the most efficacious way to reach this goal, the best way to enhance the continent's capacity to deal with the daunting and perennial challenges of underdevelopment, poverty-reduction, marginalisation and globalisation. Half a century since decolonisation, the ideal of regionalisation, while still prevalent, remains by-and-large an unfulfilled aspiration. While a plethora of regional institutions came into being over the years, Africa is still in the phase of 'shallow integration' or intergovernmental cooperation. Supra-national decision-making, the touchstone of regional integration, does not exist, even in limited form. The question raised in this article is whether ideologically inspired declarations about continental solidarity and inclusiveness alone, as epitomised by pan-Africanism, are sufficient pre-conditions for successful African integration given the divisions and plurality that exists among the 53 member states of the African Union. A new paradigm of African integration seems necessary. In this respect, Africa's sub-regional institutions, particularly the Regional Economic Communities, seem promising building blocks for authentic future regionalisation. There are also hopeful signs that as democracy takes firmer root across the continent, progressive economic growth continues in

some states, civil society becomes more relevant and assertive, and the post-colonial ancient regime makes way for a new class of rational leadership, Africa will be better positioned in future to make regionalism work as, indeed, was the intention of the founding fathers of African Unity.

1. INTRODUCTION

In view of divergent theoretical thinking in the field, assessing the progress of regional integration in Africa is a difficult, if not imprecise exercise. Particularly, because of the going out of fashion of the earlier more precise and narrowly defined teleological notions of classical definitions by modernistic, open-ended, mostly vaguely defined views, articulated in the burgeoning body of contemporary analysis about regionalism, regionalisation and integration, the identification of normative criteria and objective benchmarks for the assessment of development in the field became problematic.

An obvious dichotomy exists between the more narrowly defined earlier analyses of seminal thinkers in this field — notably Ernst Haas (1968), Bela Balassa (1961), Carl Deutsch (1968), and William Wallace (1982) and contemporary analysts who prefer to define regional integration or regionalism more generally and open-ended. Contemporary writing on the subject, under the heading of the 'New Regional Approach' (NRA) is, in general, multi-dimensional, broadly focussed, making no clear distinction between conventional interstate transactions and regionalisation, between conventional intergovernmental cooperation and authentic integration of states on a supra-national level.

In the analysis which follows theoretical perspectives in the field of regional integration are reviewed and applied to the African context. In spite of the fact that regional integration in Africa has, since decolonisation, been a primary political goal of pan-Africanism, progress has not yet moved beyond the cooperative or confederal phase of interaction. The idea of building a 'United States of Africa', or for that matter, any type of union impinging on the sovereignty of nation-states, still remains a far-off future goal, hence the term *co-operative integration* is used here to describe the process in Africa. The various efforts over the years to overcome the debilitating effects of being a balkanised, marginalised, underdeveloped continent are

analysed. On the basis of existing knowledge and experience, it seems that developing sub-continental regional groupings, particularly the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), into autonomous integrated entities, offer a more viable option than the continental African Union (AU). Under the influence of increasing democratisation, globalisation, global competition, new leadership, and new political and economic realities in Africa, change in direction are bound to take place, from which regionalisation can only benefit.

2. THEORETICAL A PRIORI'S

Regional integration in the modern interdependent world has become more pervasive and complex than ever before (Van Langenhove, 2004:12-13) a product of various permutations and the outcome of many and varied forces (Mattli, 1999:3). Invariably, these forces are the result of a multi-dimensional complex of historical, ideological, political, socio-economic and functional factors. No single approach or theory exists that can explain them and the dynamics they generate; 'integration is much more a process of becoming than it is a clear outcome or a definite political end state' (Groom and Heraclides, 1985:174). According to O'Neill (1996:5), 'regional integration ... is a multifarious rather than a uni-dimensional process ... its dynamic or momentum is neither teleologically induced nor fixed, but infused with mixed motives and variable influences'. At the same time, as Michael Schultz, Fredrik Söderbaum and Joakim Öjendal (2001:185) point out, there is no single universal criterion that defines regions '... geographical, historical, cultural and economic variables — as well as patterns of conflict/security and other criteria — all create patterns of interaction and produce conceptions of "region-ness"'. An integrated multi-disciplinary analysis is, therefore, required for proper analysis.

This perspective is relevant in regard to the analysis of African regional integration as no easy-fit theoretical perspective exists for this purpose (see Schirm, 2002:4). Also for this reason current academic analysis of African integration falls short. Particularly economic or trade-related analyses of African integration seem to be inadequate: not really congruent with the subject of analysis. Thus it fails not only to bridge the gap between politics and economics but also to encapsulate the *sui generis* nature of the African scene. Economic

analysis of African regionalisation is singled out because it is currently highly fashionable and proliferating at a pace, mainly because of the saliency of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the UN Millennium Development Goals, various Group of Eight Industrialised Nations (G8) resolutions on development aid to Africa, the prominence of the G20, the structuring of post-Cotonou trade and economic relations with the European Union (EU) (Economic Partnership Agreements — EPAs), the current World Trade Organisation (WTO)-led Doha initiatives towards global trade reform in which Africa has a big stake, as well as post-conflict reconstruction in war-torn areas.

According to Mattli (1999:11), the problem with economic analyses is that they 'look primarily at market relationships between goods and factors of production within (the) region and assume away the relevance of institutional and political forces ... economic explanations are positive theories of welfare gains and losses associated with regional integration, not explanations of the political choices that produce such areas'. Although economic and political integration are part and parcel of the interactive integration syndrome, the primacy of the political dimension, the indisputable *locus* of authoritative decision-making, is self-explanatory. As correctly pointed out by Reginald Green and Ann Seidman (quoted in McCarthy, 2007:9), the case for 'African Economic union is a compelling one' but to attempt 'economic union in isolation from political unification is utterly unrealistic'.

How voluntary regional integration is viewed in Africa, depends largely on epistemology, the definition of the concept. The narrow definition, represented by the classical or traditionalist approach articulated, *inter alia*, by Karl W Deutsch, Ernst B Haas, W Wallace, and LN Lindberg, would include a teleological dimension and make a clear theoretical distinction between conventional foreign policy transactions and actions which are per definition integrationist. To start with, there must be the necessary and sufficient preconditions as well as a clear integrationist intention among role players to start with. A federal supra-nationalism is envisaged as ideal type resulting in a 'new political community superimposed over previous ones' (Haas, 1968:16). Furthermore, this approach makes a clear theoretical distinction between integrative and non-integrative regional policies; per definition, all cross-border interaction cannot necessarily be labelled

as 'integrative', a distinction current analysis, particularly economic analysis, of African integration fails to articulate clearly.

The recent emergence in the theoretical conceptualisation of regionalisation, the so-called NRA, represents the modern broader definition distinguishing between 'old regionalism' and the modern version. NRA is 'based upon the assumption that the multi-dimensionality of contemporary regionalisation warrants a new type of analysis, one which transcends the dominant theories of regional integration. Under the NRA, integration is conceptualised as a multi-dimensional and socially constructed phenomenon, wherein co-operation occurs across economic, political, security, environment and other issues. It involves not only state actors but also private industry and civil society' (Van Ginkel, 2000:4).

Elaborating on the need for a more multi-focussed point of departure, Michael Schultz, Fredrik Söderbaum and Joakim Öjendal (2001:2) conclude that:

(T)he multidimensionality of contemporary regionalism warrants a new type of analysis, which transcends the dominant theories of regional integration, such as neorealism, functionalism, neofunctionalism, institutionalism, market and trade integration, structuralism, development integration, and so on. The mainstream theories in the field may still provide valuable and sensible insights, but in our view they are neither designed for nor capable of capturing the multidimensionality, pluralism and comprehensiveness of contemporary regionalisation processes, nor the way in which these are socially constructed. In contrast to the different versions of mainstream regional integration theory (particularly the 'old' theories), we argue that the analysis should avoid fixed and one-dimensional definition of regions as well as a narrow and simplified focus on instrumental state strategies, regional organisations, security alliances and trading blocks; It is rather a genuine concern with the processes of regionalization in various fields of activity that should be our guide to analysis.

Because integration is a variable condition rather than a fixed concept, and as there is no generally accepted or essentialist definition of the concept, the various approaches to regionalisation should not be seen as standing in zero-sum relationship. By including a complexity of variables in its theoretical arsenal, the multi-dimensional

focus of NRA adds to the better understanding of the complexities of the integration phenomenon. But at the same time, care must be taken to avoid a veritable theoretical super-market approach where 'everything is related to everything else'. Relevance and congruency are important attributes of any political theory and the question is how these theoretical approaches, separately or combined, could be synthesised into a useful analytical instrument to explain the uniqueness of African integration. Theory should add to understanding, explaining, and prediction of reality (Söderbaum, 2002:36). As stated by Cox (1995:31), 'theory ... follows reality in the sense that it is shaped by reality. But it also precedes the making of reality in the sense that it orients the minds of those who by their actions reproduce or change that reality'. So, perhaps, one should not be too fastidious about the terms 'old regionalism' and 'new regionalism', bearing in mind the Chinese proverb that it does not really matter whether the cat is white or black as long as it can catch mice!

Yet another theoretical dark hole in current theoretical thinking, trade-based theories and the NRA included, is the inadequate way the normative or qualitative dimensions of regional integration are explained. They emphasise the positivistic aspects of the process, but a process achieving what, leading whereto? At the same time, no qualitative or normative distinctions are made; successes and failures are not measured adequately, directions of change are not outlined, and goals are not clearly identified. While voluntary regional integration is still in a premature phase in Africa, it would at this stage seem feasible, at least from a theoretical political science perspective, to distinguish empirically between the processes and phases of integration as part of a cumulative, continuing, evolutionary process towards greater improvement in Africa's capacity to create greater and sustainable development, to improve the general welfare and security of its people and to become integrated in the mainstream of the world economy.

Unique factors to be considered in regard to African integration are, particularly, Africa's view of itself in the context of the rest of the world as well as its own mission; the overarching symbolic role of African Unity; the realities of Africa's political geography; the largely underdeveloped state of most African nations; the state and evolution of Africa's institutions; international trade practices; the divisive as well as unifying factors giving rise to conflict as well as coopera-

tion; the concentration of power and the dominant role of the state in all spheres of action and the top-down nature of decision-making; sub-regional economic cooperation, Africa's high level of dependence vulnerability *vis-à-vis* the outside world; the limited role of non-governmental agencies and the emerging role of civil society on the continent.

Regionalism in Africa could, therefore, at best be regarded as 'work in progress', 'integrative cooperation', *en route* to deeper regional integration and creating greater cooperation and more welfare, security and stability in the fields of politics, economics, security and culture. Compared to the EU, often cited (also by African leaders) as model for African integration, political as well as economic, the continental process is still in its rudimentary stages. Of course, the caveat should be added that the time factor should not be lost sight of. The European model took some centuries to evolve to where it is today. At the same time, African integration is a fairly recent phenomenon and it is fair to assume that in time it will evolve more successfully over the long term.

3. THE IMPERATIVE OF AFRICAN REGIONAL INTEGRATION

The *raison d'être* of the AU (AU Commission, 2007:5) is continental regionalisation. It set for itself the goal of building by the year 2025:

A united and integrated Africa; an Africa imbued with the ideals of justice and peace; an inter-dependent and virile Africa determined to map for itself an ambitious strategy; an Africa underpinned by political, economic, social and cultural integration which would restore Pan-Africanism its full meaning; an Africa able to make the best of its human and material resources, and keen to ensure the progress and prosperity of its citizens by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the globalised world; an Africa engaged in promoting its values in a world rich in its disparities.

The rationale behind African integration is quite obvious: acting on their own, most African states are destined to remain vulnerable marginalised, even beggar nations; ever deeper integration is the only way towards African development, stability and relevance in a globalised world.

Today, more than six decades since decolonisation, Africa remains the most backward continent on the globe as attested by the alarming levels of economic underdevelopment, abject poverty, political instability, as well as the perennial armed conflicts in and among various states. Between the 1960s and 2000 sub-Saharan Africa registered absolute declines on virtually all indices of socio-economic development. More recent quantitative indices (Gross Domestic Product [GDP] growth in particular) showed improvement in some African countries, but in most cases economic growth has not been transformed into national development in the broadest sense of the word. It goes without saying that both growth and development are needed to overcome is the incapacity, particularly of Sub-Saharan African (SSA) states, to escape backwardness and marginalisation, and to become integrated in the mainstream of globalisation. The SSA region is populated by 628 million inhabitants; of the 49 countries in this vast area, 34 or 71 per cent, are defined by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as least developed countries (LDCs) and 15 are landlocked (McCarthy, 2007:8-9). Most of these countries are too small, both in area and population, to develop and sustain viable economies. This is indeed a colonial legacy, the outcome of the 19th century scramble for Africa and the resultant artificial borders and balkanisation of the sub-continent, designed without consideration of the realities of geography, ethnicity or economic viability. As stated by Ikome (2007:44): 'States spawned by the process of colonialism were by no means nations; rather they represented shells of territorial independence in which the kernel of national identity had been planted by the independence movements'. However, in spite of their utter condemnation of colonialism, African states, to this day, absolutely and steadfastly refuse to redraw the continent's debilitating balkanised colonial geopolitical architecture (also enshrined in the AU Constitutive Act) and to introduce new structures to overcome the geopolitical deficiencies imposed by colonialism.

4. THE GAP BETWEEN PRACTICAL REALITY AND ASPIRATIONS

If it is accepted that regional cooperation is the starting point towards an integrative process, what takes place in Africa must be seen in

this context. Indeed, voluntary political and economic regional integration have been a high priority on the African agenda ever since the demise of colonialism more than half a century ago. Unfortunately, however, authentic or 'deeper' regional integration is still a far-off aspiration as the progress has never really moved beyond the level of minimalist sub-state and intergovernmental cooperation (AU, 2007:196). When the AU was established in 2002 to replace the largely dysfunctional Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the amalgamated African Economic Community (AEC), some leaders, suggested that its structure should be loosely modelled on that of the EU. As a case study of successful integration, the EU is obviously the best example that does exist. However, comparisons should not be taken too far: while the AU and the EU do share various structural similarities, both organisations are *sui generis* in their own way, and Africans are, in any case, generally dismissive of the notion of 'Eurocentrism'.

Even so, an interesting convergence is to be found in the philosophical roots of both organisations. As is the case with the intellectual underpinnings of European integration and the evolution of 'the idea of Europe' as a remedy against nationalistic wars, African integration demonstrates a similar motivation, proclaiming and promoting the 'idea of Africa' as statement against colonial exploitation and as rallying call for African states to stand together and unite to overcome the ravages of the past and to become developed, modernised and prosperous. A second convergence is to be found in role perception. Europeans realised after the war that as individual nations they would not be able to stand up against the might of the United States of America (US) and the Soviet-Union and that cooperation was absolutely necessary against the prospect of being marginalised. Emerging from colonialism in a world threatened by Cold War ideological rivalry as well as Western economic dominance, newly independent African nations similarly realised that standing together and cooperating as one fraternity of nations offered the chance to survive in the brave new world of post-colonialism. However, these superficial similarities aside, Africa and Europe will ultimately follow different integration paths with different strategies and outcomes.

From the start of the process in 1958, European leaders shunned any idea of an all-inclusive grand design in favour of a step-by-step process; African leaders, on the other hand, while embracing

the ideology of 'African Unity' or 'pan-Africanism' failed to live up to the challenges, demands and opportunities of the unity they ostensibly embraced (Olivier, 2007:27-30). Paradoxically, at the formation of the OAU, in spite of the rhetoric and singing the praises of unity, the state-centric (confederal) Westphalian model of sovereignty was accepted and institutionalised as the ruling paradigm and political lode star. It could be argued that because the 'idea of Africa' or being 'African' manifests so prominently and naturally in the sense of identity among Sub-Saharan Africans, continental integration ought to be easier, than say, to establish a 'United States of Europe'. While a 'United States of Africa' (USAf) remains an ultimate aim (Adedeji, 2008)ⁱⁱ⁾ the post-colonial leadership, driven by expediency and power-political considerations, the imperative of nation-building and consolidating national identity still outweighs institutionalising a pan-African identity and statehood. What makes it easier for African leaders to play it both ways is the fact that the two identities exist symbiotically, interchangeable, side-by-side, to be used the way it suited them best depending on the circumstances. For this reason, African governments could politically afford to pay lip service to the imperative of African integration while in actual fact they are nationalistic stand-patters (AU 2007:par. 1). A 'USAf' (United States of Africa), will, therefore, perhaps indefinitely, remain beyond the realm of African *realpolitik* (*Business Day*, 16 February 2009).

Since Ghana's independence in 1957 to the present, institution-building supported by elaborate bureaucratic structures, summits, conferences and talk-shops have indeed proliferated under the umbrella notion of African unity and integration. While these may be the harbingers of more authentic and deeper integration in future, it cannot camouflage the reality that there is still a long way to go. In the mean time, African Unity and state-centric nationalism are cleverly exploited by governments to perpetuate and legitimise the post-colonial continental geo-political *status quo*; to render inviolable status and legitimacy to national leaders of whatever ilk, and to proclaim sovereign national states a *sperrgebiet*ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ apropos foreign influences or intervention. The largely dysfunctional OAU institutionalised this mindset, proclaiming state-centric intergovernmentalism as Africa's paradigm for the future, a practice continued by the AU^{iv)}. African integration, therefore, has yet to transcend the colonial Westphalian barrier^{v)}, remaining essentially a state-centric, a linear rather

than a deepening exercise.

5. EPISODES OF AFRICAN INTEGRATION

Langenhove and Costea (2007:12) characterise regional integration as various 'generational sequences' rather than 'waves', 'underlining the coexistence of several kinds of regional agreements different in quality/content, while also acknowledging that some forms of regionalism build upon previous ones'. African regional economic integration are indeed in the nature of linear (see McCarthy, 2007:6-40), loose-standing, mutually exclusive stages or episodes rather than cumulative 'waves' or 'sequences'. African integrative cooperation, therefore, represents a mixture of sequential, chronological, not necessarily cumulative episodes of regionalisation, moving along slowly, still lacking the ingredients that would render it a success recipe in terms of problem-solving propensities. It is both political and economic, that is, state-led, developmental, and market-based, in terms of policies, practices and institutions.

Viewed from this perspective, the **first episode** of African regional integration was dominated by political forces spawned and unleashed by anti-colonialist fervour and epitomised by notions of 'African Unity', 'African Fraternity' or 'Pan-Africanism'. These notions implied African political unification, the creation of a 'United States of Africa', a single united African political entity. As Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah counselled: 'seek ye first the political kingdom'. Africa first had to get its political house in order before it could move on to economic and social goals of development. He received only the support of the six states which aligned in the socialist oriented Casablanca Group. The majority of the newly independent African states, the 19-member Monrovia Group with Nigeria in the lead, preferred a 'gradualist' approach articulated as a process starting with economic integration, preceding a political union, introduced at the 'sub-regional level and proceed in stages beginning with functional cooperation leading towards, perhaps, a common market' (Ojo, 1987:103). The rift between the Monrovia Group and the Casablanca Group was eventually laid to rest with the formation of the OAU in 1963 and with it the debate about continental political and economic integration. Particularly damaging to the integration ideal were the provisions of the OAU charter that colonial inherited national

frontiers should be respected and that interference in member states' domestic affairs would not be tolerated.

The **second episode** of African regional integration is highlighted by shift from the continental geo-political approach to the sub-regional economic domain of market-driven intra-state or extra-territorial cooperation.^{vi)} The United Nations (UN) General Assembly and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) mooted functional cooperation for five 'economically viable' sub-regions: North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa, building to an important extent on pre-independence institutions and practices (Ikome, 2007:40). This development was informed by the 'concern for economic revival, renegotiation of position in the world economy and for attracting more aid money'. It also demonstrated a 'similitude of approach and will of the states to create free trade areas and form customs unions, set up consultative and decision-making bodies conferring to these community groupings the formal attributes of a union comparable in its external attributes to the European Union' (Bourenane, 2000:18). The upshot of this initiative was the formation of the formal establishment of the following RECs: The Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), the Economic Union of West African States (ECOWAS), the Community for Central African States (CAEC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), formerly known as the Southern African Coordinating Conference (SADCC).

The failure to put ambitious grand schemes and good intentions into action runs as a continuous thread through Africa's post-colonial history (see Olivier, 2007:147-148). On the one hand, African governments, by and large, fully realised their weaknesses and what solutions ought to be followed, but on the other hand, and invariably so, narrow nationalistic and power-political considerations outweighed the imperatives of reform. The failure of economic regionalism in the immediate post-independence phase is one example of this. As Adedeji points out, 'with limited Southern African exceptions, most regional economic co-operation schemes launched in the 1960's had become moribund by the end of the 1970's ... the process of region-building in Africa's first decade of independence was often no more than a declaration of intent, and an indication of continental alignment' (Adedeji 2002 cited by Ikome, 2007:147-148).

The **third episode** of African regional integration was heralded

by the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Full Act of Lagos (FAL) in 1980 authored and actively promoted by UNECA. This new effort to revitalise the African economy was in response to the failure of the post-colonial economic strategies and the diagnosis that development strategies should be revised and redirected to a more inward-looking mode of action. The LPA was the first effort to deal with economic problems in a unified, pan-African fashion. According to Adedeji, it was based on the idea that 'Africa's development could not be merely a passive result of the world system to which the continent has been bound by the historical legacies of slave trade, colonialism and the various neo-colonial associations and agreements such as the Lomé and Yaoundé Conventions with the European Economic Community' (Ikome, 2007:51). African heads of state and government put the blame for the failure roundly on external forces, which have been more sharply felt in Africa than in other continents of the world. In particular they refer to 'unfulfilled promises of global development strategies (which) have made it stagnate and become more susceptible than other regions to the economic and social crises suffered by industrialised countries. (T)hus Africa is unable to point to any significant growth rate, or satisfactory index of general well being, in the past twenty years' (quoted by Ikome, 2007:51-52).

From an integrationist point of view the LPA was a step forward. It re-introduced pan-African themes, emphasising continental cooperation for the purpose of greater, faster and sustainable development. In particular it laid stress on the concepts of African solidarity, collective self-reliance and self-sufficiency, economic progress on self-sustaining socio-economic development, reducing its dependence vulnerability *vis-à-vis* 'external nations'. According to the African Development Bank, the LPA was articulated around the concepts of solidarity and collective self-reliance: a self-sustaining and endogenous development strategy; and a policy of self-sufficiency in basic need (African Development Bank 2000). Underlining a commonality of purpose, the 1980s were designated as the 'industrial development decade for Africa'. Sub-regionalism was simultaneously brought into play by the ECA covering three sub-regions, that is, ECOWAS, the Preferential Trade Area for East and Southern Africa (the predecessor for the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa — COMESA) and the Economic Community for Central Africa (ECCAS). Later, in 1989, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) was added

to the list. Regionalism was at the heart of the LPA's plans for African economic restructuring: 'efforts towards African economic integration must be pursued with renewed determination in order to create a continent-wide framework for the much-needed economic co-operation ...' (Lagos Plan of Action, 1980:paragraph 4); hopefully, it seems, as a precursor to an eventual African economic community able to interact on equal terms with external economic powers.

It is highly debateable whether blame should be apportioned on 'outside forces' alone for the failure of the LPA as a remedy for Africa's ills; actually, Africa performed worse on the economic front than it did before its introduction. No doubt, an array of extraneous factors, particularly the impact of realities of the international political economy highlighted by the new trade and monetary policies introduced by the Bretton Woods institutions, the decline of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) regime, the oil crises of the 1970s, the ideological divisions of the Cold War, the failure of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) to breach the gap between North and South, as well as the intellectual contradictions and confusion about economic policy and development strategy contributed to the failure (Ikome, 2007:57-75).

However, the main cause for failure must be put squarely on the shoulders of African governments. Recalling the symbolic role of African Unity in the 1960s, only to be ignored, apart from being paid lip service to in subsequent years, the plight of the LPA conveys a sense of *déjà vu*. As in the former case, the LPA foundered primarily because African governments lacked the will and leadership to implement it. In their calculations, the short term economic and political cost of implementing the LPA outweighed the long term benefits. Narrowly perceived immediate political interests triumphed over the long term benefits of regionalism as governments concluded that the costs of economic transformation were too high and the risks too big for the ruling class to entertain. At the same time, African governments were looking over their shoulders to see what others were doing, afraid that they would enjoy 'free rides' at the expense of others without making the same sacrifices. The structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) of the Bretton Woods institutions, with no interest in regional integration in any case, stood ready with financial resources to lull non-compliant governments further into the comfort zone of short term thinking.

These developments were serious a set-back for regional integration in Africa, exacerbated by the fact that the various regional institutions set up by the LPA included no power of sanctions in regard to non-compliance: 'This failure gave unenthusiastic governments the latitude to try to "free-ride" on regional schemes, or even renege entirely on their regional commitments. Worse, since the entire LPA framework was premised on collective action, every African government made its actions subject to the actions of all the others; so that the failure to sanction the non-compliance of the least cooperative states served to discourage even the most ardent proponents of collective self-reliance' (Ikome, 2007:90).

The Abuja Treaty of 1991, marking the **fourth episode** of African integration, was introduced to remedy the shortcomings of the LPA. Abuja underlined yet again the lack of clear vision and understanding, if not confusion, among African leadership in regard to solving the continent's perennial economic development woes. Policies introduced in the 1980s to reduce the continent's dependence vulnerability *vis-à-vis* the North and to find an alternative to liberal economic practices was summarily discarded again to make way again for the latter, thus spelling defeat for the LPA's inward-looking regionalism and self-reliance and a victory for the liberal SAPs of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). A second major development, particularly from regionalisation point of view, was the formation under Abuja's auspices, of the AEC with supra-national authority to be applied as lock-in mechanism in respect of non-compliant member states. According to article 8(3) of the Treaty, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the supreme organ of the Treaty, was empowered to 'give directives, coordinate and harmonise the economic, scientific, technical, cultural and social policies of member states'. This rule was also adopted by the African RECs. Thirdly, Abuja enabled RECs to move beyond the domain of strict state-centrism, as it brought civil society into the regional equation, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and donors of development aid. Fourthly, the Treaty affected important changes in the architecture and operational scope of the RECs: the SADCC was changed into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in 1992; the ECOWAS Treaty was reviewed in 1993 (to enable sanctions against noncompliant states in respect of Abuja); the Preferential Trade Area (PTA) was transformed

into COMESA; the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the East African Community (EAC) was revived (1998 and 1999 respectively).

Although Abuja, like its predecessors, has not (yet) really moved beyond the level of paperwork and good intentions, it signalled a shift away from the LPA's self-reliant, autarkic regionalism to economic liberalism and a more eclectic form of regionalism.

Before Abuja really got a chance to prove its worth, attention shifted to NEPAD as instrument for socio-economic transformation in Africa, underlining again the continent's proclivity towards self-doubt and institutional proliferation; new plans and experiments being regularly introduced before previous ones were properly tested or implemented. NEPAD came onto the scene as yet another highly publicised Pan-African grand design or rescue plan superimposed over existing institutional layers with no effort (at least in the initial stages) to synchronise it with the already overcrowded institutional set-up. Of course, the underlying philosophy or rationale of NEPAD as an effort to bring development and stability to a poverty stricken continent cannot be faulted. Its primary objective is stated to be that of the eradication of 'poverty in Africa through the establishment of stable peace and security conditions, and promote sustainable economic growth and development, and thus enhance Africa's participation in global political and economic affairs' (Commission of the AU, 2004: 18). The fact that it identified lack of good governance as a root-cause of the continent's inability to develop itself more effectively, and the introduction of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) to assess countries' performance in this regard on a voluntary basis, signified an important shift towards greater realism and progressiveness in the political thinking among some African leaders. Insofar as NEPAD promoted 'Regionally Integrated Spatial Development Initiatives'^{vii)} it stimulated cross-border cooperation in RECs paving the way for creating viable starting points for a more bottom-up and probably more effective way of regional development, attuned to the highly diverse and complex nature of the SSA political and economic realities.

However, after all that was said and done, the jury is still out whether NEPAD will succeed where all the many other similarly ambitious plans which preceded it had previously failed. The fact that its main architect, Thabo Mbeki, has left the political scene is a major

cause for pessimism. For the vast majority of Africans, NEPAD remains a distant and vague phenomenon which has not changed their lives, something they do not quite understand or feel enthusiastic about.

Of course, it is highly doubtful, if not impossible, that progressive integration can take place in an underdeveloped environment, where economic conditions are generally backward, where rampant poverty prevails, where communication infra-structures are primitive and even non-existent, where educational standards are lagging, where good government practices and the rule of law do not prevail, where primary needs dominate, where cooperative interdependence is limited, and where societal security is under constant threat. To its credit, NEPAD is focussed on the elimination of these problems of underdevelopment, but its operational strategic methodology seems cumbersome, complicated, over-bureaucratic, state-centric and top-heavy with little or no grass root involvement. The solution to these problems on a state and societal level seems to be the 'missing link' of African regionalisation.

NEPAD was not established primarily as an instrument of African integration. Paragraph 69 of the official NEPAD document lists 'increased African integration' as last on its long list of goals. Paragraphs 90 and 91 allude to the smallness of most African countries in terms of population, *per capita* incomes, markets and limiting 'investment that depends on economies of scale for viability'. The document goes on to state that: '(T)hese economic conditions point to the need for African countries to pool their resources and enhance regional development and economic integration on the continent, in order to international competitiveness'. And almost as an after-thought it adds that 'the five subregional economic groupings of the continent must, therefore, be strengthened'.

The most recent episode of African integration was introduced with the launching of the AU in 2002 in Durban, South Africa, to succeed the largely dysfunctional OAU and the AEC. This event was preceded by an 'Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government' in Sirte, Libya, 8-9 September 1999, where the decision to establish the AU was taken. The AU was essentially a continuation of the existing paradigm of integration. Echoing the OAU founding principles, the preamble and statement of objectives (art 3) of the Constitutive Act of the AU are punctuated by emphasis-

ing unity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation. Similarly, Westphalianism remains a dominating principle, the emphasis being on sovereign equality and non-interference.

Some indications of a rethink emerged among African leadership about hitherto impenetrable sovereignty. Notable in this regard, is firstly, the right conferred by the Constitutive Act for the AU to intervene in respect of 'grave circumstances' (war crimes and genocide against humanity) or if requested by member states to restore peace and security (art 4h and art 4j). In this respect the old African doctrine of 'non-interference' seems to have been redefined to 'non-indifference'. Secondly, to accelerate the process of implementing the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. Thirdly, with the creation of a Pan African Parliament (PAP), a further step in the direction of continental integration was taken. However, with all members being government appointees the strictly intergovernmental character of the AU has not changed. Fourthly, at the July 2007 AU summit held in Accra, Ghana, the main topic of discussion was the creation of a Union Government as a precursor to a USAf. Amidst differences of opinion the Assembly agreed, as a compromise, to review the AU's position regarding the movement towards a Union Government and in particular to '(a)ccelerate the economic and political integration of the African continent, including the formation of a Union Government of Africa' and to 'elaborate a timeframe to establish a Union Government'.

6. MAPPING OUT THE ROAD AHEAD

Apart from the abovementioned tentative changes in the direction of supra-nationalism and unsuccessful, half-hearted peacekeeping efforts in Sudan and Somalia, not much progress has been made beyond issuing regular statements of good intentions, running an expansive bureaucratic apparatus and organising a plethora of summits, conferences and workshops. Probably in an effort to break this vicious circle, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU set up an 'Independent High Level Panel of the Audit of the AU' in 2007 to 'accelerate and fast track the political and socio-economic unification of Africa', which has become 'real and urgent' (African Union 2007:iii) Earlier, in 2004, the Commission of the AU unveiled an ambitious 'Strategic Framework' and 'Vision and Mission' docu-

ment for the AU, to contribute to a 'peaceful and prosperous Africa, driven by its people and a dynamic force in the global economy' (African Union 2007:12). The Abuja Treaty of 1991, the AU Commission and the High Level Panel of the Audit of the AU have all come forward with their own time tables or recommendations regarding African integration. Abuja (art 6), taken fully on board by the AU, marks out six stages of variable duration over a period of 34 years to bring about the AEC:

1. Strengthening the RECs (five years)
2. Stabilisation of tariffs and other barriers to regional trade, strengthening of regional integration and infrastructure, coordination and harmonisation of RECs (eight years)
3. Establishment of a free trade area and customs union at REC level (10 years)
4. Coordination and harmonisation of tariff and non-tariff and non-tariffs between RECs (two years)
5. Establishing of an African Common Market and common policies (four years)
6. Integration of all sectors, establishment of an African Central Bank, African single currency, African Economic and Monetary Union and electing the first Parliament (PAP) (five years)

Learning from regionalisation/integration experiences in Africa as well as elsewhere in the world these goals seem overly ambitious. In its 'Plan of Action: Programmes to Speed Up Integration for 2004-2007' the Commission lists 23 'Priority Programmes', mostly of aspirational or symbolic nature, without any methodology or effort to measure or evaluate the outputs. Previous ambitious rescue plans for Africa have invariably foundered because of overreach or naïve idealism, and in this case, unquestionably, the stumbling blocks are many and formidable. Implementation will require continental political consensus, substantial immediate sacrifices by member states, internal political and economic reforms, strong leadership, skilful administration and effective institutional architecture, popular acceptance and, above all demonstrable successes. The Commission, however, does present its strategy as both a top-down and a bottom-up process, probably the most sensible route to follow.^{viii)}

On its part the Audit Report identified eight broad benchmarks (African Union 2007:189) 'on the basis of which, arguably, the project of African unity and integration will stand or fall over the long-run'. These benchmarks include the:

- a) coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of institutional frameworks;
- b) popularisation and internalisation of the core values underpinning the Constitutive Act;
- c) engagement and mobilisation of the peoples of Africa for the unity and integration project;
- d) free movement of the peoples of Africa;
- e) rationalisation of the RECs;
- f) fast tracking of the move towards an African Common Market and the AEC;
- g) acceleration of steps towards the establishment of continental financial and monetary institutions; and
- h) orientation of the African entrepreneurial elite towards regional and continental investment projects that advance unity and integration.

While the Commission's proposals indicate a paradigm shift in African integration, nothing of this kind comes out in the Audit Report which, in terms of prevailing orthodoxy, emphasises economic integration in favour of political integration. The Commission, while admitting that the vision of a united and integrated Africa will take time to achieve, is candid in its assessment that acceptance of policy changes by Member States is obligatory. These policy changes may include the '... acceptance by Member States of gradual transfer of sovereignty and delegation of power at Regional level might lead the RECs to evolve from intergovernmental management approach to confederal and later, federal management' (African Union 2007:11). In the context of African integration, this is quite a revolutionary assessment. The Audit Report on the RECs refers to nothing of this kind, although its proposals concerning the fast tracking of the African Common Market and the AEC will inevitably impact on the political as well as the economic architecture of the continent.

While the Commission's choreographed regional engineering programme offers some new thinking, the Audit Panel's invariable sterile orthodoxy does not. Even so, both have aligned themselves unequivocally on the side of a stronger and more concerted effort to make African integration a reality and if methodology rather than principle is the main stumbling block, a future change to a more workable paradigm seems possible.

7. LESSONS FROM THE EU AND HOPE FROM THE RECS

Given the disappointing track record of institutionalised pan-Africanism as a problem-solving mechanism particularly the lack of real progress towards continental political and economic integration, the question remains whether the AU could live up to its own expectations. As the High Level Panel of Auditors point out, the Constitutive Act of the AU does not indicate what ought to be done to promote and accelerate the objectives in operational problem-solving terms, focussing on cooperation rather than integration (African Union 2007:2-3). While the importance of the AU as a symbol of the African liberation struggle and the historical and emotional authenticity of the 'idea of Africa' are beyond doubt, the begging question is why, as an organisation possessing so much legitimacy and authority, continues to fail so consistently to solving the continent's many problems. If meaningful or deeper political and economic integration offers the best solution, as is correctly assumed by the AU, the question is why progress towards this end remains so disappointingly slow.

At the heart of the problem lies the fact that its 53 member states are too diverse and too divided to make decisions beyond following the dictates of the lowest common denominator. It is conceivable that an AU comprising likeminded governments in terms of standards and practices of good governance, trade and integration policies would have a much better change of regional success than the present dispensation has. Even so, is not conceivable that the lax membership criteria of the AU will change to something akin to the strict Copenhagen criteria of the EU.

As the European experience shows limited, step-by-step economic/functional integration paved the way for future successes. The

larger, more ambitious experiments in integration (notably the European Defence Community and the European Political Community of the early 1950s) failed noticeably while the small step that led to the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) demonstrated that integration was feasible, encouraging the six member states to work together (McCormick 1999:67-68). It was the first time that any European government had given up powers to a supra-national organisation, serving at the same time as a good testing ground for what was to follow. As stated in the Messina Resolution of June 1955, the ECSC foreign ministers agreed 'to work together for the establishment of a united Europe by the development of common institutions, the progressive fusion of national economies, the creation of a common market, and the progressive harmonisation of their social policies' (quoted in McCormick 1999:68). After half a century many of these goals have been realised. Although, as already emphasised, the EU integration model cannot serve as a carbon copy for African integration, the 'Community method' employed to deal with the contradictions between supra-nationalism and state-centrism could be instructive for African integration (see Devuyst 2003).

The Eurocentric orthodox theory of regional economic integration involves the creation, in linear succession, increasingly more advanced stages of economic integration: preferential trade area, free trade area, customs union, common market, economic union and political union. This theory posits that '(p)olitical integration constitutes the ultimate stage of economic integration, and it presupposes the unification of economic and political policies and that the central supra-national authority not only controls economic policy but is also responsible to a common parliament' (Schirm, 2002:7). African integration efforts followed a different route, starting with a top-down political initiative in the form of the OAU, recently renamed as the AU, with the RECs, focussing on economic sub-regional integration, following later. Although one would have expected African integration engineering to shun a Eurocentric approach by following the development integration model pioneered by Prebisch and Myrdal,^{ix)} it seems to favour an open-ended eclectic approach.

In view of the restrictive political/ideological parameters the AU is subjected to, it is difficult to see it progressing beyond its present confederal nature in the foreseeable future. The most propitious way

forward to authentic regional integration in Africa seems to be working with the RECs as building blocks, implementing variable step-by-step implementation strategies, each one following its own integration strategy, rather than following a pan-African holistic approach. As pointed out by Adebayo Adedeji, the EU is more like the RECs in Africa, working together towards establishing a free trade area and common market as well as promoting regional infrastructural, agricultural and industrial development in their respective regions and working together towards the creation of an ACM and the establishment of an AEC. In this fashion they constitute the building blocks of an African Economic Community under the umbrella of the AU (Adedeji 2008:14).

Some RECs will be more successful than others but the spillover effect from successful sub-regions to less successful ones could be instructive. Indeed, the Abuja Treaty highlights the role of RECs as building blocks for political and economic integration in Africa as a propitious way forward. But there is still a long way to go. As pointed out in the Audit Report of the African Union, the RECs 'are very much behind even what was considered in 1991 as a generous estimate of the time it would take to achieve economic integration' (African Union 2007:126). RECs such as the AMU, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), ECOWAS and the Intergovernmental Development Authority (IGAD) are yet to fully establish Free Trade Areas (African Union 2007:20).

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Over the past 50 years, there have been consecutive cycles of optimism and pessimism about Africa's future and predicting directions of future change remains as problematic as ever. Yet, once again, there are some hopeful signs. What seems to be emerging after all the trials and tribulations of past decades is a new sense of African realism, underscored by changes in the political mood among the emerging African middle class, the intellectual elite and civil society in general in some (albeit still a minority) African countries. Although it is still early days, these changes might be the harbingers of better things to come. Positive signs are that regional integration has been afforded higher saliency, particularly in the sense that it is more frequently being discussed in African regional *fora* indicating new ur-

gency about the necessity to accelerate progress.

Further significant developments are that the iron law of non-intervention enshrined in the doctrine of the now defunct OAU has made way for a new doctrine of non-indifference, implying that national sovereignty can no longer be used by dictators, abusers of human rights and warmongers as an impenetrable shield against outside intervention; the APRM stresses good governance, respect for human rights and that the rule of law are the *sine qua non* of any qualitative and sustainable improvement in the lives of the African people; sub-regional economic communities (RECs) are touted to play a critical role as functional building blocks of continental integration; and on the economic growth front, positive signs are emerging in a number of African countries where sound growth has been recorded in spite of the global financial crisis of 2009 onwards. At the same time, however, as pointed out, growth without development and modernisation could prove to be sterile.

In the end, Africa's future is very much in its own hands. What the continent's current leadership has to prove is that 'African solutions to African problems' can really work.

ENDNOTES

- i. Research for this article formed part of the MERCURY PROJECT, funded under the European Commission's Framework VII Programme. An earlier version was presented at a workshop at the Centre for Comparative Integration Studies, Aalborg University, Denmark in 2009.
- ii. It is still debated how exactly the USAf will be structured. Gadaffi favours a single continental federal entity; South Africa's Thabo Mbeki subscribed to a Union of African states, initially based on intergovernmentalism, moving to supra-governmentalism, then supra-nationalism in an incremental fashion.
- iii. Hence the dictum 'African solutions to African problems'.
- iv. According to Mattli (1999:28-29), 'Intergovernmentalism holds that integration can best be understood as a series of bargains between heads of governments of the leading states in the region. These political leaders, jealous of their national sovereignty, carefully circumscribe any sacrifice of sovereignty that may become necessary to attain common goals. Big states exercise a *de facto* veto over fundamental changes in the rules of integration'. As a result, 'bargaining tends to convert to the lowest common denominator of large state interests'. However, as Mattli suggests, 'as a theory of integration, intergovernmentalism suffers from several short-

- comings'. Moreover, in the African context, Mattli's depiction is flawed insofar as, the law of the most common denominator is not a derivative of big state bargaining as he suggests; this mode of decision-making does not apply to decision-making in regional organisations which is invariably consensual and non-hierarchical.
- v. See, for instance the inventory of 'New Regionalism' assembled by Andrea Goldstein (2003:36-65).
 - vi. Mattli (1999: 41) defines economic integration as 'the voluntary linking in the economic domain of two or more formerly independent states to the extent that authority over key areas of domestic regulation and policy is shifted to the supra-national level.' However, no regional arrangement in Africa has yet moved to the supra-national level. In fact, the institutional equivalent of the European Coal and Steel Community has not yet even come about in Africa.
 - vii. NEPAD facilitated the adoption of development corridors as a model for consolidating infrastructure and investment in specific cross-border regions in RECs.
 - viii. The *locus standi* of the Commission's recommendations (having been drawn up by outside consultants, and seemingly superseded, even ignored, by the Audit Report) is not quite clear.
 - ix. Transnational cooperation and cross-border flows, involving a mixture of market integration, functionalism and neo-functionalism, institutionalisation, and so on (see Schirm 2002: 7).

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