



Regional Integration and African Renaissance: Moving beyond the rhetoric

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Abstract

The balkanisation of Africa by the imperial forces of Germany, France, Britain and Belgium at the Berlin conference of 1884-1885 created ‘bondage of boundaries’, which continue to shape and define socio-economic and political trajectories of the African continent. The artificial boundaries created a set of what some scholars have appropriately characterised as ‘northern problems’ because societies which hitherto existed together as one were torn apart into different sovereign states, while people with dissimilar cultures, customs, languages and orientation to life were lumped together into the same geo-political entities. The result has been a continent that is not only factitious, but one made up of micro-states that are dependent, beggarly, divided and riddled with internecine conflicts.

Various attempts have been made to forge regional integration on the continent. However, such attempts have been tepid, incoherent, insincere and generally beclouded by narrow nationalism of political leaders who feel secured in their positions at the state level. The paper argues, and demonstrates, that various historical trajectories of Africa such as Arab and European slave trade, colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism as well as neo-imperialism have constrained and constricted the capacity of the continent to explore and maximise its latent potentials. Despite what some see as its conceptual contradictions, African renaissance is a concept which expresses the hope and conviction in the ability of African people and nations to overcome the current challenges and to achieve socio-cultural, scientific and economic renewal. Using African historiography of the struggle against colonialism through the agency of Pan-Africanism, this paper argues that Africa must move beyond rhetoric pertaining to the current approach to regional integration and take more concrete actions through which the well-being of Africa’s peoples become the focus in order to achieve African renaissance.

Introduction

The history of state formation in Africa broadly defined in terms of its artificiality, arbitrariness, violence, exploitative and extractive purposes as well as its weakness and incapacitation necessitates a conscious effort to move beyond this political unit to other forms of institutional arrangements geared toward achievement of the goal of development on the continent. When constructed on the robust ideology and underpinned by relevant philosophy, regional integration can be an ideal political arrangement for obviating the problems that are associated with the state in Africa.

The point of departure, as Gumede¹ argued, is that “regional cooperation and long-term regional integration are likely to boost sub-Saharan Africa’s path of economic growth”². Regional integration has been defined ‘as the process by which supranational institutions replace national ones, the gradual shifting upward of sovereignty from state to regional or global structures’ (Goldstein and Pevehouse³, cited in Ajayi and Oshelowo,⁴). African renaissance, on the other hand, is shorthand for furthering Africa’s development or the rebirth of the African continent and its peoples. Whereas the essence of moving the state level to some regional arrangements have been recognised by various political leaders in Africa, the tepidness and diversities in their approaches, lack of profundity and depth in their strategies, divisions among the political leaders, external interference, confusion as to the benefits that such arrangements will confer on the people, inadequate mobilisation of the people for the realisation of this noble objective and lack of thorough consciousness of the dynamics of power, interests and racist philosophy that sowed the seed for the bifurcation of the continent and the sustenance of the status quo by the global imperial designs have combined to weakened and threatened the realisation of the integration of the continent along economic and political lines⁵.

The various encounters that Africa have with the global imperial powers over the past five hundred years in form of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism and globalisation have not only derailed the evolutionary process of development which every society should be entitled to, but have fundamentally altered the very being of an African in terms of confidence, psychology, culture, language, epistemology, social-economic and political systems. Curiously, the subjugation and exploitation of the continent continue apace today under various guises and designs. Consequently, Africa needs to be re-invented and restructured in such a way that the lost dignity, pride, glory, confidence and capacity of being could be restored⁶.

To be sure, there have been past and present efforts geared toward integration in Africa both on the regional and continental levels. However, failure has been due to many factors not the least of which is the inability of the political elites to link the agenda of integration to the issue of African renaissance – put differently, there has, arguably, not been an explicit connection between African renaissance and regional integration. Rather, economic considerations, which are locked into the neo-liberal global socio-economic and political order of creating market access through the removal of tariffs and non-tariff barriers, have been the motif force of the regional integration agenda. We argue that this disconnect of the integration efforts from the renaissance lies at the root of the slow space or reversals of attempts at forging a continental unity that Africa has witnessed over the past fifty years or so. There is therefore a need to re-engage with the regional integration efforts and African renaissance from a more pragmatic and more encompassing dimension rather than the current economic prism. Using the decoloniality perspective as a method of interrogation, we argue that regional integration must be re-conceptualised and re-interpreted within the African existential and historical conditions in order to use it as a means of achieving African renaissance in the 21st century.

Section two of the paper lays out the theoretical basis for re-engaging regional integration and African renaissance through the theoretical lenses of decolonial epistemic perspective and Pan-Africanism. The third section traces the past and efforts geared towards regional

integration in Africa. Section four establishes the link between integration, Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance while section five concludes.

Integration and Renaissance in Africa: A theoretical inquisition

Integration and renaissance are two interrelated issues that would determine if Africa will ever reclaim her lost position of relevance, eminence and reverence in international affairs. The essence of integration is informed by the historical factors and forces that culminated in the bifurcation of the continent into enclaves of dependency, weakness and predation. On the other hand, renaissance is necessitated by the need to correct the distortions that racist anthropological and philosophical perspectives such as those advanced by Hegel, Hayes and their likes. This is imperative because Africa has continued to bear the effects of the distortions that such racist views about the continent conjure in form of its relations with other parts of the world, epistemological and ontological densities of knowledge production on and about the continent, level of consciousness of the citizens, their world views and their daily experiences.

Various scholars have argued that experiences of slave trade, colonialism and contemporary patterns of relations of Africa with the West have been informed by the notion that the continent is a dark continent in need of civilisation, enlightenment and assistance (see for instance, Mpofu⁷). Ndlovu-Gatsheni⁸ argues that “the idea of race was deployed to justify such inimical processes as slave trade, mercantilism, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid as well as authoritarian and brutal colonial governance systems and styles”. We argue that it is also within the context of the above processes that the regional integration agenda of the continent has been constructed.

Theoretically, the pursuit of regional integration in Africa has been situated in the market oriented approach, in which post-independent African countries have attempted to copy the European Community and its processes of integration⁹¹⁰. This approach fits into the mould of neo-liberal economic doctrine in which free trade, market access, capital mobility and economic liberalisation are considered as the main reliable vehicles for realising socio-economic development. By following this paradigm, African leaders have failed to grasp the salience of ideological dominance, historical trajectories of the political economies of the dependent and micro-states that make up the continent and the reality of power relations that continue to define the way in which the West relates with the African continent. As various scholars have argued, the historical processes of state formation in Africa are different from that of the West, especially those of Europe.

Differences manifest in the capacity or lack of capacity of the state to bring about the development of endogenous capitalism and its transformative effects on the society¹¹¹². Differences also manifest in the ability of the state to mobilise capital through the development of its productive capacity. In the main, the states in Africa were created for extractive purposes, domination, exploitation and violence, as many have argued. To a very significant extent, states in Africa have been “successful” in serving the interest of the metropole, and the transnational capitalist class. Thus, when neo-liberal institutions like the World Bank links the development of Africa to the pursuit of regional integration it is an integration that serves the interests of capital and the owners of capital, that is, the

transnational corporations and their local allies as the latest World Bank¹³ African Competitiveness Report unashamedly demonstrates. We argue that this narrow economic perspective to regional integration is limited in its usefulness and fall far below the idea of an African renaissance.

We now turn to the decolonial epistemic perspective. In a nutshell, the decolonial epistemic perspective

“aims to critique and possibly overcome the epistemic injustices put in place by imperial global designs, and questions and challenges the long standing claims of Euro-American epistemology to be universal, neutral, objective, disembodied, as well as being the only mode of knowing. It is ‘an-other thought’ that seeks to inaugurate ‘an-other language,’ and ‘an-other thinking’ that has the potential to liberate ex-colonised people’s minds from Euro-American hegemony”¹⁴.

Unlike other theories which seek to interpret the African conditions within the superstructure created by the colonialists, decolonial epistemic theory offers a profound interrogation of these conditions, their causative elements in form of structures and institutions, human agency and importantly, the continuity of colonial legacies and the inherent contradictions in this system that obscure any possibility for transformation and development in its current form. Scholars of decolonial epistemic perspective have located the theory around four main pillars or concepts Vis-a Vis the past and present relations of Africa with the West. These concepts are: coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being and coloniality of nature. These “foursome” have been elaborated to explain the deliberate global imperial design of the West to keep Africa as a perpetual appendage through imposition of a self-styled notion of what is considered the “standard” of behaviour, value, governance, knowledge, civilisation, institutions, nay, of being.

In relation to the issue of regional integration and African renaissance, it is in the realm of coloniality of power that one can best understand the futility of pursuing an integration agenda that is informed by purely economic consideration, rather than socio-cultural, psychological and other teleological intentions. It is also in this realm that one can understand the failure and inability of the states in Africa to genuinely pursue meaningful integration. Although coloniality of knowledge also speaks to these immanent contradictions, its essence can be found within the former as it relates to these issues. Ndlovu-Gatsheni,¹⁵ describes coloniality of power as “the description of how the current modern global Euro-American-centric and capitalist structure was organised, configured, and articulated according to imperatives of global imperial designs...coloniality of power unpacks coloniality as that broad but specific and constitutive element of global model of capitalist order that continues to underpin global coloniality after the end of direct colonialism”.

The decolonial epistemic perspective finds currency in Susan Strange’s idea of the internationalisation of production networks as an inevitable outcome of global capitalism, in which corporations seek outlets for cheap labours, higher returns on investments, freer regime of trade, investment and capital ¹⁶. In tandem with Robinson’s idea of transnational capitalist class (TCC), the notion of coloniality of power enables us to further understand the power dimension of the relations of the West with Africa in respect of the continuing domination, exploitation, exploitation and neo-imperial control of the supposedly independent states¹⁷. Robinson highlights the intricate relationship that exists between the state and the global

capitalist class in an age of globalisation. Under this construct, the state exists as a mere instrument of enforcement of neo-liberal reforms, policies and programmes, if necessary by violence. In this process, the interests of the members of the political class are secured through co-optation into the transnational capital class, kick-backs from multinational corporations and support for anti-people policies. Given the highly lucrative nature of political entrepreneurship that politics has come to assume, the political leaders can hardly pursue any integration agenda that is not based on the dictates of the global imperial designs or anyone that will threaten their power base. With this understanding then, comes the challenge for progressive forces in Africa to seek to reclaim the pursuit of integration of the continent through another perspective – African renaissance and Pan-Africanism, reconceptualised and made practical.

Pan-Africanism has been the driving force for the emancipation of Africa from the grip of the global imperial design since the 19th century. It is a socio-cultural political force which was successfully deployed to end slave trade and political colonialism. Though its origin was the Diaspora, it soon became a popular rallying point for resistance against colonial domination of continental Africa. Although it succeeded in ridding the continent of political colonialism, it has failed, so far, to actualise the integration of the continent as one powerful bloc. Various reasons have been advanced for this failure, but the most pertinent is the lack of consensus among post-independent African leaders of or on who is an African as well as the best method to actualise the agenda of unifying Africa¹⁸.

Regional Integration in Africa: The Past and the Present

While some post-independent African states such as Obafemi Awolowo and Nkrumah advocated the building of a federal union of African states and United States of Africa, respectively, others such as Julius Nyerere and Tafawa Balewa preferred a gradual approach to integration of African post-colonial states – the debate on the approach to continental unity is generally understood as “Monrovia versus Casablanca” as scholars who have written on this subject characterise differences in approaches. Over the past fifty years, the gradualist approach to integration in Africa has prevailed. Indeed, the dichotomy and dissension in approach continues until today. As Adejumobi and Olukoshi¹⁹ would argue, the transformation of the defunct Organisation for African Unity to African Union through the Constitutive Act of the African Union of 2000 was to give effect to the realisation of the United States of Africa. Just as in 1963, when African leaders could not agree on the best approach to achieve this objective, they were again divided at the Ghana Summit of African Heads of States and Government in 2007. Nigeria and South Africa differed from the vision of Libya on the best approach, for instance. While late Muammar Ghadaffi of Libya preferred the creation of the United States of Africa, both Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa opted for a gradualist approach²⁰.

With the commencement of the African Union in 2002, the continental body has initiated various strategies towards the full integration of the continent in line with previous arrangements as was contained in the Abuja Treaty for African Economic Community. Indeed, the Heads of States and Governments of African Union (AU) have adopted regional integration as an overarching continental development strategy. In line with the gradualist philosophy, which underpin its strategy, the AU has a “vision to achieve an African

Economic Community (AEC) as the last of six successive stages that involve the strengthening of sectoral cooperation and establishment of regional free trade areas”²¹. This would be achieved through the traditional process of having a continental customs union, a common market and a monetary and economic union. The strategy was also based on using the regional economic communities as building blocks towards the realisation of the African Economic Community. In this regard, the AU recognised eight regional economic communities which include, Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCA) and Arab Mahgreb Union (UMA)²².

African countries have also agreed on a Minimum Integration Programme (MIP), which comprises of activities, projects and programmes which the Regional Economic Communities have identified as deserving urgent attention in order to realise the objectives of regional and continental integration processes. The MIP provides a framework which allows the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to proceed at different paces in their integration processes. It also provides for monitoring and assessment mechanism within the AU’s Strategic Plan²³. Part of the indicative strategy of the African Union in fast-tracking the realisation of the African Continental Free-Trade Area (ACFTA) include reduction in barriers to trade and investment, free movement of persons and labour, right of establishment, free movement of goods and services, and free movement of investment and capital. At the sub-regional level, a Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA) is also being negotiated between SADC, EAC and COMESA.

While these processes are going on, the African Union Commission (AUC) came up with the idea of “Agenda 2063”. Agenda 2063 is conceived of as an,

“an approach to how the continent should effectively learn from the lessons of the past, build on the progress now underway and strategically exploit all possible opportunities available in the immediate and medium term, so as to ensure positive socioeconomic transformation within the next 50 years”²⁴.

In addition, Agenda 2063 also

“emphasises the importance to success of rekindling the passion for Pan-Africanism, a sense of unity, self-reliance, integration and solidarity that was a highlight of the triumphs of the 20th century”²⁵.

At the face of it, these attempts seem laudable and inspiring enough to think that at last the continent might be on its way to achieve the much needed unity and development. However, we argue that the various strategies outlined above are not materially different from the paths that have been taken towards integration of the continent in the past fifty years or so. Both in philosophy and approaches, the challenges remain the same. As we have already observed, the focus on economic integration as the first step towards advancing the unity of the continent may not go far because the continent is still bedevilled with various economic constraints in form of lack of sufficient cross-continental integration, dependency on single sector and usually raw commodities, absence of economic agglomeration and so on. There is also the danger that the various free trade areas could be locked-in into the globalisation

processes, represented by the new emphasis on regional trade agreements. This could ensure, sadly, that developed economies and emerging ones in Asia and Latin America will be the main beneficiaries of the free trade areas on the continent.

Although the AUC claims that Agenda 2063 emerged out of consultations with various stakeholders on the continent, it fails to appreciate the urgency of continental unity as a precondition for African development and renaissance, as Gumede²⁶ emphasises. By postponing the full integration of the continent to the next fifty years, the AUC has more or less signified that the continent can continue to be exploited through divide and rule strategy of the West and easy manipulation by other parts of the world. The current trend, in which developed and emerging economic blocs are forging various forms of partnerships both across the Atlantic and Pacific levels, leaves no room for Africa to postpone its integration until 2063²⁷. For instance, negotiations on the EU-US Trade and Investment Partnership are scheduled to be concluded in 2015. If Africa must move beyond rhetoric in its desire for integration, a new bold and urgent approach which transcends the pursuit of economic integration is imperative.

Integration, Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance: Going beyond symbolism

The need for integration in Africa has both historical and empirical justifications. Given the limitations of the previous efforts and attempts at achieving integration in Africa, it is imperative to deploy other methodologies and philosophical framings toward this objective. Despite the many travails of Pan-Africanism as a movement, it holds great potential for the realisation of the full integration of the continent, including the sixth region. But to achieve this, it must be properly contextualised, bearing in mind the nuances of history, psychological distortions and subjugation – products of colonialism and imperialism and the state of mind of an average African. Perhaps the first step towards this reconceptualisation is raising the critical consciousness of Africans to the reality of their situation in terms of continued deprivation, weakness of the current state structures, economic dependency and common destiny²⁸. To be sure, Africa is made up of various tribes and tongues as well as nationalities²⁹. Yet, the citizens are bound by a common historical experience, which necessitates a collective action towards transformation.

Pan-Africanism is inextricably linked to the unity of the people of Africa – Pan-Africanism is essentially about the unity of Africans and peoples of African descent, as many have described it. Given the complexities that surround the notion of unity, Chinweizu³⁰ identifies various dimensions of the unity that post-independent African leaders of different hues have pursued. Chinweizu identifies unity as state integration of political federation of all black people of the world; unity as solidarity of people based on distinctive racial, cultural, linguistic and historical identity; unity through a shared ideology or religion; unity through a hierarchy of organisations; unity through joint activity, unity as a functional bloc or league and unity through one mass organisation with one voice. Chinweizu advocates for an African unity that is premised on “popular solidary organs” among others in a way that distinguishes the blacks from the others.

It is worth noting that Chinweizu cautions that in order to ensure that the unity of the continent is meaningful, it must be backed-up with a programme of power and collective security. In this regard, Chinweizu laments that ‘it is absolutely amazing, quite tragic and a great sin of omission, that collective security has not been a concern of Pan-Africanism since

1958³¹. It would appear that the African Union has started to address this gap with the setting up of the Peace and Security Council. The United Nations-African Union Joint Task Force on Security could also be a step in right direction in ensuring that the continent is secured against both internal and external aggressors. However, the limitations of this unit manifest squarely in its dependence on foreign donors. For instance, the Task Force could not intervene in the Mali crisis in 2012 until France came into the picture.

Beyond the issue of power and security, Pan-Africanism must include a programme of capital mobilisation and accumulation if it is to achieve the objective of African renaissance. Although past African leaders such as Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo, among others recently, came up with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) as a framework for ensuring both economic and political renaissance in Africa, the programme has been criticised for beholding excessively to the West and as a caricature of a blueprint for renaissance on the continent³². We share the view that the pursuit of African renaissance must be rooted in the collective aspiration of the people of the continent to rediscover their self-hood, personality and worth. As Nabudere³³ argues, "for African renaissance to be of any political significance on the African continent, it has to address and motivate the very people it is supposed to re-awaken and re-energise, namely the African masses". Thus, in converting the rhetoric of regional integration in Africa to reality, the people of Africa must be mobilised to understand that the ties that bind them in terms of colour and history of deprivation should make them discountenance the artificial barriers and psychological dissonance imposed by the imperialists and fight collectively for true freedom. This will require sharing experiences, resources, talents and opportunities, among other things. It will also involve active involvement of the AU in further forging a sense of cultural, social and economic solidarity among the peoples of the African continent.

Conclusion

As Gumede³⁴ argues, in the context of what could Africa pursue to navigate global economic crises, "improving regional integration also must play a role"³⁵. The African renaissance that is desperately needed on the continent should be the one that goes beyond seeking approval, approbation or affirmation from those agents which Chinweizu³⁶ correctly describes as the enemies of Africans. It should be a renaissance that is firmly rooted in the understanding that the more the current state structure is retained and the more Africa continues to look towards the same forces that crippled and continue to emasculate Africa's development potential. In this endeavour, critical consciousness of the primary motive of the forces that Africa is confronted with and unity of purpose are central. Thus, this paper establishes that there is an inextricable link between regional integration and the realisation of the goal of African renaissance in the 21st century.

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