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The Case of The African Union

Muchie, Mammo; Habib, Adam; Padayachee, Vishnu

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Cirkeline Kappel

The DIR Secretariat
Research Center on Development and International Relations
Fibigerstraede 2, room 99
Aalborg University
DK-9220 Aalborg East
Denmark
Tel. + 45 96 35 83 10
Fax. + 45 98 15 32 98

E-mail: cirka@ihis.aau.dk
Homepage: <http://www.ihis.aau.dk/development/>

African Integration and civil society: The case of the African Union

Mammo Muchie, Adam Habib and Vishnu Padayachee¹

The future of Africa, the modernization of Africa that has a place in the 21st century is linked up with its decolonization and detribalisation. Tribal atavism would be giving up any hope for Africa. And of all the sins that Africa can commit, the sin of despair would be the most unforgivable... My generation led Africa to political freedom. The current generation of leaders and the peoples of Africa must pick up the flickering torch of freedom, refuel it with their enthusiasm and determination and carry it forward.

(Julius Nyerere, *New African*, January, 2000)

1. Introduction

For nearly forty years African integration was the exclusive domain of the political elites that occupied high office in Africa's post-colonial states. To the extent that it occurred, these elites tried to pursue policies of regional co-operation as a means of integration ostensibly to achieve the double aim of social and economic development and a reduction of dependency on the metropolitan countries. "When Pan-Africanists signed the charter of the [Organisation for African Unity] in Addis Ababa, what they had in mind was the liberation of the continent from colonialism and apartheid - so far the only elements of consensus" (Pondi, 2001: 1). The rhetorical commitment at the annual and rather ritualistic meetings of the OAU to end all vestiges of colonialism, to promote African unity, and oppose South Africa's apartheid state, continued over a period which saw many heads of states and governments forcibly removed from office, often superseded by those even less committed to national development, reducing dependency and deepening democracy within their nations.

Claude Ake has observed in this context that "most African regimes have been so alienated and so violently repressive that their citizens see the state and its development agents as enemies to be evaded, cheated and defeated if possible, but never as partners" (1991: 13).

¹ The authors are respectively Professor and Director of the Research Centre on Development and International Relations, Aalborg University, Denmark; Executive Director of the Programme on Governance and Democracy at the Human Science Research Council, Pretoria; and Senior Professor at the School of Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.

Beyond an effort to express a collective voice in support of the broader African struggle to be freed from racialism and colonialism, the OAU cannot be said to have reached a threshold of integration that can meaningfully coordinate external and internal political, economic and social policies to promote credible and sustainable institutions for democracy and national development.

At a meeting of African Heads of States in Durban, South Africa on July 9, 2002, the OAU was replaced by the African Union (AU). Rather than continuing the dominant state-centered process of integration, the AU has written into its Constitutive Act, a commitment to transform itself into a people-centered organ. The vehicle of this transformation is envisaged to be the active participation of civil society. The move from a state-centered to a people-centered or civil society-activated integration process raises critical issues such as how state-society relations can be reconceptualised and reconfigured.

In one sense, the formation of the AU has opened a Pandora's box that had been tightly closed under the OAU. While the AU has opened the space for civil society to participate in shaping what is yet to be forged as a people-centered AU, it leaves many questions about the nature of the partnership and power relations unanswered: what exactly is the nature of the participation by civil society? Is this merely an invitation to civil society to inform decision makers and raise issues for the agenda without full participation in the shaping of AU institutions and the making of a tangible contribution? How substantive is the envisaged participation? What kind of civil society participation do state officials and the civil society actors envisage? Will the AU foster a new civil-society and state relationship?

Our central thesis here is that Africa's integration agenda should be cast on rather different foundations to those of other cases. We argue that civic participation should be an integral component of Africa's integration agenda, and encouragingly, the AU has distinguished itself from its predecessor by explicitly committing itself to a people-centred and participative programme. It has institutionalized this through the establishment of Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC). However, problems still endure - ECOSOC for example serves mainly as an advisory body, and its constituent civil society elements have to have the endorsement of the relevant state. This sub-optimal participation of civil society weakens the people-participative character of the AU with serious consequences for the integrative impetus within the continent.

2. The debate over African integration

Approaches to African integration emerging post-decolonization have varied. The first approach sees pan-African integration as either 'global' or

‘continental’; the second emphasizes unification of states as opposed to a unification that included people, liberation movements and trade unions; and the third approach poses a rapid political unification as opposed to a gradualist economic unification. Other contentious issues related to building citizenship identity – focus on issues such sub-regional integration and continental integration; nation building within post - colonial states or pan-African nationalism; as well as the problems arising from sub-national protests. These remain important to this day and are not yet resolved. We attempt here to set out the perspectives in each of these in order to appreciate the complexities and problems of African integration.

2.1. The ‘global’ as opposed to the ‘continental’ concept of African integration

These two conceptions of Pan-African integration have existed since African decolonization in the early 1960s. The ‘global’ conception continues to celebrate and recognize the origin of the pan-African movement in which all those people with African origin are to join a worldwide movement for emancipation, in which solidarity and unity is paramount with the idea of liberation advocated. The ‘continental’ version of African integration evolved as an attempt to unite the post-colonial states in Africa, and emerged after the fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945. Continentalism promoted a unification of states, not races or other categories. Continental pan-Africanism, in its most ambitious version, advanced an argument for a united states of Africa, including the Arab states in North Africa. Curiously, under the current AU arrangements, the Diaspora has been recognized as a sixth region. This seems to overcome the continentalist vs. globalist pan-African integration bifurcation satisfying in part the demand of the Diaspora to be included whilst keeping continental representation in the process of integration. Global pan-Africanism traces its origins from slavery and gives primacy to cultural unity of Africans inside and outside the continent, whilst continental pan-Africanism accords primacy to geographical, political and economic variables. The debate between the two conceptions will not have a closure for a considerable time. As the Diaspora finds an institutional node for participating in AU matters, and as Darfur type human rights violations are attributed to the historic tension between Arabs and Africans, the AU will have to open the debate on its conceptions of pan-Africanism in order to find a broad framework to accommodate the diverse thinking and approaches that exist (in reality) in shaping the future of Africa.

Within ‘continentalism’ there are also two approaches proposed for accelerating African integration. One is a cautious partial approach where regional units are formed in order to carry out economic and technical projects and other related activities. The main form of grouping is thus not continental but partial and

regional and sub-regional involving actors from three and more states. The other is a continental-universal approach involving the whole continent. The OAU was an example of the universal approach to integration whilst SADC, ECA, and other regional groupings constitute partial modes of regional integration. The partial approaches to integration encourage unity indirectly by motivating joint action on common problems. The universal approach has the weakness of putting together contradictory governments that may not carry out action and may thus prolong pan-African integration. The case of the OAU has been used as an example for the ineffectiveness of the universal approach within continentalism to bring about unity. The main aim of the OAU was to bring all states together rather than to establish stringent conditions of membership. Joint action has been difficult when the membership has been so varied and failed to share similar approaches to problems.

The problem with including the Diaspora is what white, Arab, Indian and mixed origin Africans think of it. Should identities combine origin or ancestry and the current domicile/home of an individual? Hence Indian-Africans, Arab-Africans and/or African-Arabs, European-Africans etc may be one way out of the dilemma. However identification with the existing states these communities live in may be greater than any wider African identity. These issues are real and some sensible resolution must be found in order to advance the African integration project with clarity and inclusion of all communities that can contribute to it. If the affected identity groups select their own identity and are free to choose that which they value and seem to define them best, then the issue will solve itself. Failing this, it is incumbent on those driving the integration project to find conceptions that can accommodate all, without alienating communities in Africa while at the same time permitting input into Africa's structural transformation by those in the Diaspora.

Each state in Africa has often defined identity as a common nationality, common culture, language, territory and assumed/putative shared values of some nature. 'When it comes to establishing the African commonwealth or *civitas* additional identity criteria are required to create the African identity. Thabo Mbeki's "I am an African" concept offers a perspective on how the heterogeneous expression of African identity might allow different communities to be part of the evolving African commonwealth. For Mbeki the concept appears to provide a category where varied/heterogeneous communities can come together and express an African-citizenship based identity and pride in Africa whilst remaining black, white, brown, or yellow; and it would be inclusive of the Diaspora.

It is a double invitation: firstly, it offers to people living in Africa, who trace their original ancestry to different places outside Africa, the opportunity to be

Africans. Secondly, for people who were forcibly removed from Africa and who find their struggle to free themselves the same struggle as those in Africa, they too can become Africans.

The problem of the lack of a pan-African ideology that can vigorously guide the African renaissance cannot be underestimated. The state-centric African unity suffered from lots of opportunistic moves and a credibility of commitment. In Africa, unity as an intention was proclaimed by all, but unity in practice did not progress far enough to match such expressed intentions. This gap will continue to exist until a pan-African ideology is developed that underscores openness, citizen participation, accountability, transparency and effectiveness in the principles and procedures for creating fully democratic and socially legitimate institutions for the 'Africa-nation'.

2.2. Integration of states and/or integration of peoples

Until the African post-colonial states were formed the pan-African movement could justifiably be called a peoples movement. After the formation of the OAU in 1963, the main baton passed from people to governments. The OAU was mainly a meeting of the heads of states of the newly independent states. The opportunities for participation of people became closed as the OAU was seen as sufficient in representing the various countries and its peoples.

After Ghana won its independence in 1957, there were two separate meetings in 1958. The first was a meeting of the newly independent heads of states. The second was a meeting of non-governmental parties, trade unions and liberation movements. The first meetings of the non-governmental All-African Peoples Conference (AAPC) was held in Accra in December 1958. Parties and fronts that were invited included the Algerian National Liberation Front and even the predominantly white Liberal Party in South Africa. (Hoskyns in Hazelwood, A. (ed.), 1967: p. 362). Subsequently two more meetings were held: the second in Tunis and the last in Cairo in March 1961. The AAPC declined after the Cairo meeting. In its resolutions it called for a united states of Africa with support to liberation movements and it decided to set up a secretariat in Accra. Except for Ghana and Guinea, there was not much support from Nigeria and French speaking West Africa for the AAPC. While the AAPC meetings included liberation movements and trade unions from within the continent, it did not include movements from the Diaspora. When the 6th Pan-African Congress was called in Dar es Salaam in 1974, African Governments pushed to take an active part forcing many prominent scholars to withdraw their participation (such as C. R. James). The last Pan-African meeting took place in Kampala in April 1994. The OAU did not give concessions to political parties, colonial dependent territories, social movements and civil society organizations until 2001 when it

made the decision to give way to the African Union a year later. It is the OAU that convened the first meeting of civil society in June 2001 with a Conference title of “Building partnership for promoting peace and development in Africa.” A civil society desk in the secretariat of the OAU was one of the tangible outcomes of the first OAU-Civil Society Conference.

A remarkable feature of the conversation on African integration is the fact that there has always been an identified goal that is shared by all types of political communities. When the OAU was formed in 1963 both the radical Casablanca group with its slogan ‘Africa must unite now’, and the Monrovia group who argued that Africa should unite gradually both claimed “unity” as the goal.

Both saw the state as the chief vehicle of realizing this Africa-wide unity. There was no explicit recognition of the role of the people, community based associations and civil society in bringing about African integration. It was a matter of elites bringing light and civilization to the masses. The masses are constructed as passive and the elite as active and with agency. Thus the states through elite manipulation were to unite themselves for Africa and for the people. It was a delegated model of representation where the people were neither informed, consulted much less asked to counsel or participate in the process. That was the conception of the time. Advocates of gradualist unity or rapid unity often were engaged with nation building based on a single party dominance. They thus shun inviting citizens to express voice or distinct interest formally or informally to be part of pan-African integration.

2.3. Which comes first: political or economic integration?

Until the 1990s, those in favour of regional integration in Africa differed on whether political or economic integration should come first. Those who argued that pan-African unity is best achieved by political integration, which allows for the creation of economic integration, did not succeed despite the ringing call by Kwame Nkrumah (leader of the radical Casablanca group). In 1963 at the formation of the OAU he said: “Our objective is African union now. We must unite or perish... the struggle against colonialism does not end with the attainment of national independence. Independence is only a prelude to a new and more involved struggle for the right to conduct our own economic and social affairs... Nothing will be of avail, except the united states of Africa” (Nkrumah: 1963). Those who argued that economic integration should come before - and result in - political integration were worried about losing recently acquired political power, and unsure of whether political unity would not bring more chaos than progress.

The first generation African leaders of the Ivory Coast, Senegal and Liberia (the Monrovia group) were advocates of the gradualist and functionalist approach to pan-African unity. It was interesting to note that the differences between the Felix Houphouët-Boigny and Kwame Nkrumah went as far back as pre-independence times. Whilst Nkrumah was calling for independence, Boigny called for the formation of a French Federation, including French-speaking African nations. He called France “a light which must not be extinguished.... France has never known racial segregation.” With such high estimation of France, Boigny called for “self-Government within a community” led by France. He wished Kwame Nkrumah well in pursuing the experiment of independence, but he said, “But we wish, in spirit of healthy emulation, to conduct our own experiment. The future will decide which of our methods is better.” (Felix H. Boigny quoted in Kilson, 1965: 76-77).

The OAU did not create a united states of Africa. It was a modest compromise between the economic first and political first groupings of heads of states. Its charter stipulated non-interference in each other’s affairs and respect for existing sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states and a dispute settlement and mediation mechanism. The tension between pan-Africanism and pan-Arabism within the OAU continued to manifest itself when problems and conflicts arose.

Mazrui and Tidy’s analytical distinction between a pan-Africanism of liberation and a pan-Africanism of integration (1984: xiv) is useful in order to distinguish the remaining and current challenges from those that have been confronted already and may have been overcome. The current challenge is to bring about Pan African integration on the basis of an internal social and democratic rebirth in Africa. The identification of unity as a goal is helpful, but there is a need to identify the path of integration that will make African unity an irreversible reality.

2.4. African identity or a national identity

There is also a potential conflict after decolonization between building a pan-continental ‘citizenship identity’ and building a national ‘citizenship identity’. Nyerere (1968: 342). said that their earlier proud boast ‘ I am an African” ... is not a reality.” The people of Africa are enclosed as separate citizens of the fifty-four states. The post-colonial notion of citizenship was dominated by the nation-building project of the elites. The issue is whether these citizenship identities are mutually exclusive.

The expression of many identities is seen as the celebration of diversity and a legitimate vehicle for claims to political and other forms of rights. The resolution of diverse identities into compound identities and unities is often

regarded as suspect, bearing the implication that rights and diversity might be sacrificed in the process. Also combined and hybrid identities are seen to command less loyalty than identities derived from origin, biology, cultural and other distinctive behavioural characteristics. It is argued that combined identities continue to carry schizophrenic, bifurcated and even fractured loyalties leading to breakdown at moments of economic and political crisis. The combination may not remove residual loyalties to the pre-existing entities. Worse, unless there is a new ontological base to back the compound identity, and an awareness of the need to overcome the possible assertion from the constituent entities, there will be a tendency for a phenomenon of loyalty bifurcation and even fractured expressions of identities within the combination to prevail, thereby rendering identity-hybridism continuously unstable. The negative aspects of combined identity can therefore be more unwelcome than those of the *status quo* (fragmented identities). This was the argument of some of the first post-colonial generation leaders. The more ambitious direction was the road that Africa was not to travel despite the universal and shared expression and appeals to political unity by nearly all the leaders of post-colonial states during the period of decolonization in the 1960s. Those appeals gave birth to the Organization of African Unity, but not to African unity. States retained their sovereignty allied to the system that subjugated Africa under colonialism without any reform. Nation-building in which Africans were citizens of largely disunited post-colonial states continued.

This has not prevented the post-colonial state from being challenged by subversion, threats of disintegration and re-making by ethnic or clan identity self-assertions, outbursts and affiliations from within, often aided by external interests. What makes the search for the creation of an African identity current and compelling is the fact that the disaffected take advantage of structural weakness of the post-colonial state, its continued conceptual arbitrariness, and its inability to become independent and be accountable to the population within its jurisdiction. If it has been said that combined identity may not command as much loyalty as local and less remote and familiar identities, it is also true to say that putting together groups that share little with each other in one state and splitting those that share more with each other into different states has given cause for identity groups to mobilize ethnicities into national movements for political power. There is a need to overcome and escape this perennial dilemma by positing a broader African citizenship and loyalty that frees communities to determine and define themselves whilst remaining combined and connected as part and parcel of the engine of African integration and unity.

2.5 Africa-wide integration and/ or sub-regional integration

African integration has been pursued simultaneously at continental and sub-regional levels. The continental level integration has faced various difficulties. The new leaders did not wish to divest authority to an all-African body like the OAU. Each state wished largely to pursue national development within the territory of its jurisdiction despite the fact no credible national development could be mounted in some of the smallest states. The fact that there was lack of inter-state infrastructure such as transport and communication made integration costly and trade of goods and movement of people difficult. Inter-African trade has remained low compared to that in Latin America and Asia. In addition the strong continuing dependency on the metropolitan powers militated against fostering inter-African links and building self-reliance. Poor governance and lack of democratic procedures and processes also contributed to the lack of momentum in developing continental integration in earnest.

At a sub-regional level a number of regional integration agreements have taken place. Immediately after decolonization the East African Community was retained from the British, and many of the French speaking inter-regional activities were also retained. Only Ghana seems to have abrogated all the joint institutions formed under British rule. Among them were the West African Currency Board, the West African court of Appeals, the West African Cocoa Research Institute and the West African Airways Corporations. (Asante, K.1997: 35-36). Ghana abrogated these bodies in order to prove to Africans they could work together in practice to bring about a united states of Africa. Nkrumah, Toure and Modiba Keita tried to unite the states of Ghana and Guinea in 1958 and in April 1961. Ghana, Guinea and Mali formed a political union with a charter for the Union of African States. (Prah, 2000: 24) The East African Community has been through the cycle of break-up and re-unification. It is hoped that the break-up has illustrated to the elite actors that fell out with each other the necessity to work out procedures that can address and anticipate issues that might prove contentious in the future. There are also new regional groupings such as The West African Economic and Monetary Union, The Economic Community of Central African States, the Economic and Monetary Union of Central Africa, The Common Market for Southern and Eastern Africa, the Southern African Development Community, the Arab Maghreb Union and other functional inter-state and governmental bodies. The issue that springs to mind is whether these regional integration agreements facilitate a continental integration or conflict with it. There are also a number of states that join several of these regional agreements simultaneously with little clarity on the benefits of doing so. Will the regional agreements entrench the sub-regions, or facilitate continental integration as the post-colonial states try to entrench citizenship identity?

The other problem is related to the fact that African states join as many regional groupings as possible and the degree of their real integration appears far less than the number of regional agreements they often sign. Of the 53 African countries, 27 are members of a Regional Economic Community (REC), while 18 states belong to as many as three RECs.

(Ginkel et al, 2003: p. 30)

This issue cannot be settled in the abstract and must be recognized as a problem to be addressed with empirical analyses.

2.6. State consolidation and threats from sub-national protests

Another serious problem is the threat of disintegration of the post-colonial state resulting from sub-national interests. A number of conflicts have taken place in Africa that can be related to mobilization of sub-national interests. The case of Somalia is one where the attempt to group together all the Somali vernacular speaking people enclosed in other states, through military action by the Somali state ultimately backfired to a point where the Somali state itself disintegrated. This problem of sub-state mobilization remains a real challenge, potentially threatening most of the existing states in Africa. Much of the problem can be related to the fact that state boundaries do not coincide with national or ethnic boundaries. These were drawn arbitrarily and effectively split existing communities. Whilst the desire to overcome this arbitrariness can be understood, the resort to violence cannot be condoned. A much wider pan-African vision could be a less expensive, more liberating and productive way of overcoming the limitations of the colonial cartography.

In summary, we have identified six potentially conflicting or possibly mutually reinforcing forces that complicate processes of African integration. They account largely for the weakness or strengths of the existing integration efforts.

How has the AU managed these competing tensions, and is this sufficient for advancing Africa's integration agenda? One of the more promising developments in the AU is its recognition that the current African integration initiative has to be cast on more civic foundations than either other examples in the world (European Union, NAFTA), or the attempts on the continent that preceded this (OAU). The former, of course, appear to have been driven by the logic of capital which found that national borders had become a constraint to further expansion and profitability. Africa's economy, with the exception of South Africa, is still not sufficiently developed enough to generate similar pressures for expansion. As indicated earlier, its state elites while paying rhetorical commitment to integration in earlier decades had no incentive to drive this agenda.

It is only civil society, we would maintain, that is capable of providing the impetus towards integration. As has so often been noted, Africa's boundaries were artificially imposed. Its relations between peoples and networks are as a result not constrained by these national boundaries. Indeed, much anthropological literature on the continent points to the transnational character of people's engagements, particularly in border communities. Add to this the migration of people as a result of wars and the pursuit of economic livelihoods, and you can imagine a rich tapestry of transnational civic activities. It is thus this sector that can provide the impetus for regional integration, were it to be organized appropriately and interacted with on an equal footing.

3. Critiquing global conceptions of African integration

There is both an empirical and normative difference amongst those wishing to integrate Africa in what units to choose first, what strategy and path to follow, how to integrate and to what end. What is to be integrated: peoples, markets, spaces, production, goods and services, resources, values, norms, policies, strategies, procedures, activities, functions? What is and/or should be the criteria of such integration? There is also the question as to whether integration should be viewed as a process or as a final destination. In the African context, Asante has defined integration 'as a process whereby two or more countries in a particular area voluntarily join together to pursue common policies and objectives in matters of general economic development or in a particular economic field of common interest to the mutual advantage of participating states.' (Asante, 1997: 20). Regional integration is different from regional cooperation, the latter often being seen as the means rather than the resulting outcome of integration.

Asante defines integration in economic terms only. If one wants to move beyond this to more general definition, integration can be defined to mean any or all-significant voluntary and/or involuntary inter-state interactions that occurs between citizens, activities, institutions, governments aimed at harmonizing policy and unifying action and implementation among themselves. The search for the kind of institutional and organizational structures that facilitate such unified action in political, economic, and technical and dispute resolution spheres, constitutes the major challenge for those embarking on the project of integration.

In our view a re-conceptualization of the integration of Africa would have to prioritize the integration of Africa's peoples and not just states. The first proposition then is that there is an urgent need to review all forms of integration efforts to see how these formats may be redesigned to include the people and their direct representatives. A second important concern relates to the problem

of mimicking other integration efforts. In particular we question the dominant theories of integration that have influenced Africa's own integration efforts.

African analysts have borrowed freely from theories of integration originally developed to describe, explain and understand the European Union. Whilst borrowing from others is admissible, epistemological mimicry comes with its own hazards. Two examples of theoretical borrowing from Western sources in Africa by its own elites, can be cited. In the first, dealing with a strategy for an African economic community, a Minister from Gabon argued that: "It is perhaps appropriate to stress that the economic processes of the [African Economic Community] were inspired by the theory of optimal monetary zones, developed by such eminent economists as Mundell and McKinnon in the early 1960s." (Ondo-Methogo in Ginkel et al, 2003: 13). The second relates to the adoption of functionalist and neo-functionalist theories for building the institutions of inter-governmental authorities. "Whereas functionalism was primarily a response to concern with how to order international relations after catastrophic wars, neo-functionalism was primarily a response to the need to relate and apply functionalist ideas to the integration experiences in Western Europe and other regions." (Senghor: 1990: 20)

The theory of functionalism arose after World War II to construct an international order that is neither a league nor a federation. Functionalism rejects the notion of states coming together to form a political union. States are encouraged rather to build particular authorities to solve particular problems or provide defined services. The key dynamic of international integration lies in the transnational nature of international problems. For example, the provision of railway and airline services requires organization across national frontiers. States need to organize functional agencies for diseases, the economy and any transnational problem (Michelmann et al, 1994: 22-23).

Neo-functionalism adds the spill-over gains and losses when technical, economic and political sectors become integrated. The end point is seen in terms of technically functioning, and largely de-politicized institutionalized regional entities. It is not a general theory of integration. It is both a normative theory as well as a description of the European Community method of integration - a conceptualization of the drive to an ever-closer union of Europe.

The key problem of functionalist and neo-functionalist theories of integration is the reduction to the technical. Problems are identified as functions to be solved by putting together experts. Functionalism or neo-functionalism has no room for people and civil society participation. The main modality of integration is not shared values, territory and people but economic or political functions where organizations are invested with authority by state elites.

These theories require a thorough rethink and reworking should they be used at all in the African context. According to Anyang' Nyong'o, "the failure of nearly every initiative towards regional integration has been as much the result of flawed conception, defective policy formulation and haphazard execution of such policies." (1990: 6). The main reason for adopting functionalism is related to the strategy of gradual economic cooperation, and the fact that functional cooperation had its roots in the colonial era with the British, French and Portuguese setting up sub-regional structures in various sectors and activities in West, Eastern and Southern Africa. African leaders and their advisors also inherited the conception of regional organizations from the colonial system. Functional organizations proliferated: thus in 1982, Senghor reported 30 functional organizations in West Africa. Each region of Africa had growing numbers of such functional organizations (1990: 19).

African leaders, whether they framed the integration problem as an incremental process or a political unification outcome, cast this in terms of opposition to colonialism and racialism, and seeing this framework as sufficient. There was no recognition that a shared democratic culture was what was critical to accelerated integration, in whatever way elites wished to conceptualize this. Opposition to colonialism and apartheid may have been a necessary condition, but was not sufficient to create integration. For the entire period of the OAU's existence, democracy has been seriously deficient in African governance. The absence of democracy is not incidental. It is systemic and structural. The post-colonial states that met to accelerate integration had indefensible records in human rights and democratic governance. The OAU did not even pretend to include civil society in any of its activities. Not until the emergence of the AU did the norms, values and principles of democracy, civil society and the African Diaspora come to be recognized as essential to accelerate the African integration project. This recognition is a big step from the OAU days and the state-centered and functionalist and neo-functionalist integration approaches of the past. However, civil society participation in African integration within the AU still needs also to be theorized and operationalized, and vestiges of narrow functionalist and neo-functionalist tendencies within it tackled and eliminated.

In the past African states did not cede any power to pan-African authorities such as the OAU. It remains to be seen whether the AU will be any different. The other problem is that unlike their European counterparts, all inter-African organizations to date, including the AU, have suffered from a lack of finance, managerial and administrative skills, and therefore are forced to rely on external funding, and become vulnerable to external influences. One example is the African signature to the Lagos Plan of action of 1980. That plan aimed to transform the continent through making the well-being of ordinary people the foundation of the long-term structural transformation of the African economy.

Immediately afterwards, in 1981, the World Bank issued its accelerated development of Sub-Saharan Africa, otherwise known as the Berg Report, and which launched the structural adjustment programme in Africa. The Berg plan made receipt of IMF-World Bank loans conditional on following short-term stabilization of balance of payments (IMF) and structural adjustment of economic and social policies (World Bank). Country after country moved to sign the Berg alternative to the African Lagos Plan of Action in order to acquire loans. The IMF and World Bank insisted that each Government must be evaluated individually and pass the test individually, thereby undermining any integrative regional economic agenda.

An important consideration in integrating Africa is the need to construct shared values or norms that those wishing to pursue integration are committed to. This must be guided by democratic values. These norms are critical to further deepen integration and include the strict observance of human rights, the unfettered expansion of the African civil and public sphere, the rule of law, respect and toleration of the right to be wrong. Such norms may be important for the deepening of democratic processes of pan African integration and the ultimate desired unification of Africa, as well as the democratization of the interaction of state, the people and society. Africa will unite faster if Africans embark on democratization drives and create democratic institutions based on the logic of the self-empowerment of the people on the foundation of an effective and engaged state civil society nexus. Most African states are hopelessly dependent on something called budget substitution; that literally amounts to outsourcing their budgetary needs to donors that use this budgetary support to dictate conditions and influence local policy often detrimental to creating the engaged society and the effective local state. Weak and fragile states that have far little links to each other but retain strong links with outside metropolitan powers has not created the necessary condition for integration and rebirth on the foundation of democracy, human rights, and good government.

The attempt to remove politics from the African integration through borrowing functionalist and neo-functionalist strategies has led to the rejection of searches for common norms that can speed up an accelerated unification based on an evaluation of Africa's problems, challenges, opportunities and specific circumstances. There is a need to bring back such norms, values, cultures and civilization into pan-African integration through the active involvement of civil society in the whole spectrum and repertoire of integration efforts. The inclusion of civil society will beef up the integrative power 'independent variable' in order to increase the scope of Africa integration as the 'dependent variable'.

4. Participation of citizens in the African Union.

In Africa, the main pattern of regionalization has evolved in relation to the need to learn to cooperate, principally to deal with the historical problems of colonialism and racism. Anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles have historically involved social and political movements outside the state system. The democratization of South Africa has opened up the space to develop regional systems including the active involvement of civil society as a co-driver of the process. The inclusion of civil society in integrating Africa cannot however be simply a matter of inviting to civil society to join existing state-dominated regional arrangements. The power distribution amongst the units forming the integrative power has to be re-negotiated. If this is the case the power to set agenda, define issues and determine the path will no longer be the monopoly of governments but to a new partnership of people with governments. The whole process of integration has to be revolutionized by placing it firmly within the context of a democratizing architecture. We offer some tentative ideas that could contribute to this re-thinking of African regional systems by suggesting a democratic theory of integration that sees civil society as a central actor in the process.

With the eclipse of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the birth of the African Union (AU), came also the need to assert the values of human rights, human security, rule of law, the mutual supervision of each other's conduct and multi-party elections and so on. The opportunity to bring in values and norms has increased with the emergence of the AU. But how does the AU see the inclusion or representation of civil society? Civil society is to participate in the AU through the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC). Article 22 of the AU's Constitutive Act provides that:

1. The Economic, Social and Cultural Council shall be an advisory organ composed of different social and professional groups of the member states of the union.
2. The functions, powers, composition and organization of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council shall be determined by the Assembly.

ECOSOC does not require lengthy ratification like the African Court of Justice and the African Parliament. At the Maputo Summit in July, 2003, a draft statute recommended that ECOSOC should be composed of 150 civil society organizations "representing social groups such as women, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities, professional groups such as doctors, lawyers, media and business organizations; NGOs and community based organizations; organizations of workers and employers; traditional leaders, academia, religious and cultural associations." (Cillers, 2003: 31). Political parties are excluded because they can be represented in the African Parliament. The 150 members

are distributed as follows: two civil society organizations are to be drawn from each member state. There will be 24 transnational sectoral civil society organizations selected at regional and continental level. There will be 20 representing the Diaspora. Gender equality is expected to be expressed through a 50 percent participation rate by women members of civil society.

Civil society has been given the opportunity by the protocol to invite candidates for membership of ECOSOC and to process such applications. Thus selection of membership to ECOSOC is not exclusively government led. It is contested. It is not only the AU assembly but also civil society groups that get elected or selected to the ECOSOC. The expectation is that ECOSOC will meet in plenary once in two years. The advisory function of the Council is expected to be performed in 10 sectoral cluster committees. The latter is to be co-coordinated by a 12-member steering committee.

Evidence to date suggests that there may be a desire by some states to control, which NGOs qualify. Disproportionate power still resides in the AU governments. It is not clear yet how the power redistribution and reallocation will play itself out. In other words, it is not clear what power civil society groups in ECOSOC will have. How independent will they be? What prevents them from being co-opted?

Another question is whether the kind of participation that civil society is expected to secure in the AU is substantive in the sense that it will change the integrative equation as we tried to conceptualize above. What is the internal distribution of powers amongst the actors that are engaged in building integrative power in order to increase the scope, depth and breadth of African integration? What limits will the advisory character of ECOSOC set?

If we assume that civil society participation will enhance African integration it is important to begin to activate and mobilize civil society organs and movements across the continent. If African governments do not form integrative power relationships, communications and power distribution with their citizens, they will be likely to search for external allies that may well create problems and slow down the process of integration.

In short, the institutionalization of civic participation in the AU, while an advance, does not go far enough. Both the advisory character of this participation and the fact that it requires the consent of the relevant national government, suggests that civil society's status within the institutions of the AU is not sufficient to enable it to serve as the impetus for a renewed African integration initiative.

More has to be done if civil society has to become this impetus. It requires initiatives from both civil society and the state. With regards to the former, much of civil society to date is established and operates within national boundaries. In recent years, some transnational activities have become evident, for instance, the South African Trade Union Federation's support for the labour rights of their counterparts in neighbouring African countries. Transnational civil society does not as yet have sufficient critical mass to warrant it being taken seriously by regional political elites. Much more organization and mobilization thus needs to happen on transnational foundations.

Political elites could also do more in this regard. They need to become more open to the possibility of a more equal partnership between themselves and civil society. Of course many of them would argue that there is no need for such an equal partnership for they, having been elected, have the greater legitimacy to engage in regional decision-making. But sources of legitimacy can be multifold. As the corporate sector gets consulted on matters economic because of their command over investment, so too must civil society be included in decision-making concerning the peoples of Africa.

How should these interactions be organized? Probably through structures very similar to the existing ones, but constructed on a more equal footing. Civil society recommendations cannot simply be advisory, and their participation should not be dependent on the sanction of state elites. Of course civil society cannot and must not be treated as a homogenous entity in these deliberations. On different issues, different types of civic entities must have prominence. On matters pertaining to agriculture, for instance, collectives of farmers must be heard more prominently than, for instance, unions. On matters academic, the academy and the student federations must be consulted. This then imagines a civil society that is more plurally constructed, and political-civic engagement must be mindful of, and cater for such plurality.

5. South Africa's role in African integration.

It needs to be borne in mind that every integration initiative should have a lead agent, and it may well be argued that Africa's has to be South Africa. Not only is the country economically dominant and now the largest contributor to foreign direct investment in Africa, but it is also the architect of much of the peace building and institution-building exercises on the continent. However, while conceding the value of South African democracy for the continent, the nature and form of its economic expansion is more contentious (on the latter issue see for example Issa Shivji, 2005a, 2005b). In a recent paper Habib and Selinyane in assessing the country's role in the region, have argued provocatively that:

South Africa's role should in fact be one of hegemon. Simply being a pivotal state, albeit an important one, means rejecting the role of leadership. This is not in South Africa's interests, nor those of the region. Stability in the region, and, as a result, development and democracy, will only be achieved when a regional hegemon is prepared to underwrite these objectives. So long as that does not happen, South Africa's economic goals will remain compromised. For, as President Thabo Mbeki has often stated, the fate of a democratic South Africa is inextricably bound up with what happens on the rest of the continent.

(2005: 9)

Habib and Selinyane advocate that South Africa behaves as a regional hegemon willing to advance a regional political and socio-economic vision and underwrite the costs of such an exercise. They contest the view that hegemonic behaviour need take an imperial form. Instead, they argue that the United States's engagement with Western Europe in the post-World War II period provides evidence for hegemonic behaviour that can have systemically beneficial outcomes. Arguing that South Africa's foreign policy has been bifurcated, even schizophrenic at times, they nevertheless remark that South Africa appears less ambiguous about its role in building institutions for continental integration, and representing the continent on the world stage.

In this context of arguing for a 'meeting' between the state and civil society in the arena of foreign policy, Habib and Nthakeng observe that the regional or continental role of South Africa civil society organizations remains limited.

...despite the continental forays of COSATU, much more still needs to be done to create a truly regional civil society, which is necessary of the hegemonic project is to operate in a continentally beneficial way. Its task would be to constrain South Africa's political and economic elites from acting in an imperially expansionist manner [if this can be achieved] Africa may have its first serious chance to achieve stability, democracy, and meaningful development.

(2005: 17)

The crucial task, Habib and Nthakeng maintain, is to determine the structural characteristics that make political elites in the hegemon more inclined to eschew imperial ambitions and construct a more systemically beneficial regional engagement. One such structural feature among others, they believe, is the emergence of transnational civic relations. The lesson emanating from their work is that it may be in the interest of regional elites to both facilitate and accommodate transnational civil society.

6. Concluding remarks

The first phase of Africa's struggle against colonialism and white minority rule is over. The second and more difficult phase of integrating Africa has just begun. There is a need for a strong intellectual debate to find feasible pathways and signposts to make this integration possible. Through this debate and other citizen-based and community activities, we need to work out the values and visions that Africans must share to accelerate the formation of integrated Africa. A shared value and vision, which ideology provides, is currently missing from the equation. This missing link has to be discovered. The sooner it is discovered; the better will be Africa's future that has yet to arrive!

If the AU is to emerge as a people-centered union, the people have to occupy the driving seat of the integration process. There is a need for a shared power where norms and values of integration have to be deliberated upon, shared and settled. The communication between civil society and governments is one that is open and responsive. When avenues of political representation are fixed or clogged, there will be a danger to the integration effort. This is not a matter of setting procedures for participation; there must be a substantive recognition and acknowledgement to ensure that the people own the integration process through civil society organizations and other modes of representation.

A core value that will connect the logic of integration to pan-Africanism is a shared commitment to democracy. This will accelerate integration and pan-Africanism faster than any pressure, or coercive and other methods employed by the elite. We think that a common norm, value and culture that is a prerequisite for a mutually reinforcing civil society and state partnership in the process of integration is a shared belief in democratic procedures, openness, communication both procedurally and substantively. So what will accelerate African integration process is the emergence of a shared democratic norm by all the actors engaged in it. What will decelerate the process is a lack of subscription to democratic norms of decision-making. The advantage of civil society participation is bringing integration and its potential benefits down to the grassroots. In the process there will be public education, public debate, public participation and open and transparent process that lead to the accountability and legitimacy of African project of integration. We therefore propose the democratization of African integration through broadening of the base with civil society playing the anchor or pedigree in the process. All outstanding issues can be resolved in the process of democratic dialogue as long as there is no coercive pressure during public debate. We thus pose a democratic theory of African integration as a way forward to bring the future that has been prevented from arriving by the selfish elite behaviour.

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