African Integration: Many Challenges, Few Solutions

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Aleme, Yared Tesfaye (2011) *Regional Integration Schemes in Africa: Limits and Benefits of Taking on EU's model to the AU*, Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, ISBN 978-3846554968.

Arowosegbe, Jeremiah (2011) *The State and the Challenges of Nationhood in Africa: Ake's Theory of Political Integration*, Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, ISBN 978-3844300635.

Gabriel, Akwen (2011) *The African Union and the Challenges of Regional Integration in Africa: What Hope for Africa's Development*, Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, ISBN 978-3844315028.

Despite the political rhetoric, academic justification, and personal hopes of many, regional integration in Africa has not progressed as envisioned. Indeed, many see studies of this subject and its resulting organizations, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the African Union (AU), as old news and no longer in need of attention or scholarly research. However, this is shortsighted, as what is needed is in fact more research and debate over the progress of integration and its apparent failure.

Yared Tesfaye Aleme, Jeremiah Arowosegbe, and Akwen Gabriel have continued the debate into integration on the continent. There are two main questions that each of these books attempt to answer: First, has integration in Africa been successful and, second, what may be the best approaches for integration to take place? The three authors all agree the answer to the first question, especially during the years of the OAU, is negative and concentrate more on solutions to this problem.

Akwen Gabriel's the *African Union and the Challenges of Regional Integration in Africa*, analyzes integration as a solution to the continent's problem of development. Gabriel sees many factors as the cause of Africa's lack of development but focuses most on the effects of colonization and globalization in shaping Africa's current position in the world economy as "a supplier of cheap labor and raw materials" (Gabriel 2011:16). Thus, he studies how integration can be sustainable given Africa's narrow economic base and what could form the basis for integration (Gabriel 2011:17).

Yared Aleme also looks at whether the current conditions in Africa will allow them to follow a path toward integration in *Regional Integration in Africa* by looking at the institutions of the European Union (EU) as the inspiration for the AU and African integration. As Aleme notes, there are major differences between the two unions, notably the length and functionalist character the EU took as it built toward an economic union in comparison to the AU and the former OAU, which had grand plans but less than stellar results. His goal is to look at the benefits and limits of the EU model for the AU and for African integration as a whole.

Jeremiah Arowosegbe takes one of the more interesting approaches to integration, drawing upon Claude Ake's theory of integration. While not explicitly writing about supranational integration, the steps for integration inside the African state and the reasons for its failure can be extended upward to the international system. Many of the reasons for the lack of political integration inside the state, such as the problem of inducing commitment to a political culture, the increasing of value consensus, and cleavages in the elite and nationalist movement

(Arowosegbe 2011a:6–9) can also be seen as reasons for the lack of effective integration at the international level.

However, the problem with many of the articles and books written on this subject is that the question in regard to approaches to integration in Africa is rarely answered very well or in very much depth. Similarly, the studies conducted by these authors through primary and secondary research offer many recommendations for how African states can integrate but are broad and unspecific. Unfortunately, despite a good overview of integration efforts, these books do not offer any new ideas in the quest for economic and political integration in Africa.

Before looking at the author's ideas for solving the stagnant integration in Africa, it is worthwhile to examine their reasons for it. While many reasons are given for the lack of integration in Africa by all the authors, none go into great detail to explain exactly why integration in Africa has not occurred as planned. Gabriel blames the lack of integration on the diversity of economies between African countries as well as the fact that African leaders refuse to cede sovereignty to a supranational institution (Gabriel 2011:41), in addition to ideological differences, the economic conditions of African states, and the abundance of nonfunctional regional bodies[1] (Gabriel 2011:45–48).

Aleme provides a historical overview of Pan-Africanism, which led to attempts of African unity that were plagued from the beginning by the division between the so-called "Casablanca Group," which, led by Kwame Nkrumah, called for a federation of African states, and the "Brazzaville/Monrovia Group," which favored a slow progression toward an economic union. Ultimately, a compromise was made to establish the Organization of African Unity, which was founded as an intergovernmental organization with no real powers over states. Its main objective was to end colonialism in Africa, especially apartheid in South Africa. Its record on this is debatable, as while these objectives were met, the OAU did not have much to do with the transition. Thus, integration in Africa was flawed from the beginning and despite a change to the AU, many are still skeptical. Adopting similar institutions to the EU will not help either, argues Aleme, since all African states, with the exception of Morocco,[2] are already members; there is no shared value of democracy on the continent; and the AU has followed an overly ambitious timeline (Aleme 2011:59–65).

These authors are not alone in their criticisms, as many other articles and publications tend to provide a lot of detail about the OAU and AU by providing long lists of attempted treaties, declarations, charters, and programs that were founded under the auspices of the OAU but which accomplished very little.[3] In addition, like the authors covered here, they list many reasons for these failures, including a lack of full commitment by leaders, the need for civil society to be included in the integration process, and the lack of information available to citizens about the benefits of integration (Adeyemi 2007:216).

While there is no disputing that these authors are correct that the reasons given for the lack of proper integration are major problems on the continent, these reasons are overly broad. Ultimately, even if it was possible to create incentives to join the AU or to better include civil society, this would not actually improve the chances for successful integration on the continent. In fact, many of the problems stated as inhibiting integration, such as the unequal economic conditions in the international arena, may only be solved *through* further integration.

Arowosegbe goes deeper into the main problem of integration in Africa, be it at the state or international level. By using Ake's theory, he concludes that the "primary prerequisite for a high degree of integration is the acquisition of *a* mature political culture" and that the major problem in attaining this is the limited autonomy of the state that spilled over from

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1. Such as the Regional Economic Communities like the Economic Community of West African States, the Southern Africa Development Community, or the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. In many cases, the membership of states overlap, thus decreasing the effectiveness and necessity of some of these organizations.

2. Morocco withdrew from the OAU when the contested Western Sahara was allowed to become a member.

3. For an abridged list, please see (Adeyemi 2007:215–16).

colonization into the postcolonial state (Arowosegbe 2011a:14). In sum, this means that "in spite of independence, the absoluteness . . . and statism of the colonial state crept in intact into its postcolonial heir and defines its character as an autocratic and exclusive state," which increases the stakes for the struggle for power (Arowosegbe 2011b:10). This, argues Arowosegbe, often leads to conflict, as the state is captured by hegemonic elites and politics is based off efficiency norms rather than legitimacy norms—he who can impose his will, alienate opposition, and centralize power most effectively will stay in power the longest (Arowosegbe 2011b:11). Thus, further regional integration will require a loss of sovereignty and power from these elites to a supranational authority, which is dubious considering they are loathe to give up any power inside their own state, let alone outside of it. In a similar fashion, EU leaders will only cede sovereignty to a supranational union if it will lead to increased national prosperity, which will make re-election for the ruling party more likely (Mattli 2000:150). However, unlike their EU counterparts, the majority of African states have a low level of democracy, so national prosperity is not as important as political power and capital to continue the clientele and patronage system that keeps the leader in power. In sum, leaders in Africa refuse to surrender any sovereignty as it would mean a loss of political capital, which could develop into a loss of political power. As Adogambe states in Aleme:

> Most African ruling elites tend to perceive state sovereignty as the sources of power, privilege, and wealth within their individual state, which enables them to maintain their patronage and clientele network systems. For that reason, many are doubtful that the African ruling elites will voluntarily commit political class "suicide" by surrendering their quasi-sovereign states for a continental union governmental project (Aleme 2011:62).

While the authors did note that a lack of political will was an impediment to proper integration, more research and focus needs to be placed on this subject to find a solution to this and other obstacles to African integration.

With the broad set of reasons for the lack of integration comes a very broad set of ideas to solve the impasse of integration on the continent. Aleme, who compared the similarities of the AU and the EU, concludes that the AU "will have to chart its own course, travel at its own pace, find its own rhythm" (Aleme 2011:74) but does not give any feasible solutions on how best to start down this path. Gabriel gives many recommendations, such as: formulating development policies aimed at agriculture, industry, and public services, improving infrastructure, reformulating integration efforts to prevent copying from European models and ensuring there are no losers in the integration process, and finding strong political will for the project.

Other authors, such as Olu-Adeyemi and Ayodele, agree with many of these, though they feel that it is best to follow the EU model, unlike the aforementioned authors. Also recommended are programs at the regional level, such as within the Southern African Development Community or the Economic Community of West African States, which will create "an atmosphere of trust and confidence among nations and their populations" (Adeyemi 2007:218). However, there is no practical plan for any of these admittedly good ideas. Arowosegbe, writing about Ake's ideas of integration, contends that democracy is one way of reinventing the state (2011a:63) and the continent toward integration. That said, there are no solid ideas on how to achieve this democratization, though he stresses the need for developing ideas and solutions in Africa and not in the West, which seems similar to Aleme's argument that something "African" must be done, though nobody can say for sure what that actually will be.

There is, of course, no one-size-fits-all solution to development and integration problems in Africa, and, hence, an author can be excused for not detailing the policies or programs that may need to be put in place. However, as said before, further research has to be done on the issues of integration to streamline the ideas and perhaps develop a theory of African integration, which takes into account the variety of reasons given for the slow, if not stagnant, pace of integration on the continent.

While these papers are far from being definitive works in this field,[4] they are a start in the right direction and are recommended for those with an interest in this subject. One of the problems with the books may have been that all of the works covered are masters or PhD theses published by Lambert Academic Publishing, which offers free of charge publications of theses and major papers. While this can be seen as a useful service for aspiring academics, they follow a structure that while appropriate for a thesis, means the publication is accessible mainly for academics, which may exclude an audience of lawmakers and civil society that the authors wished to reach with their work. However, each publication does advance interesting points about integration in Africa and is a good place for undergraduate students to begin their research. Post-graduate students who may need a refresher in the basics of the AU and integration will also find these publications useful. While these books fail to provide substantive ideas for promoting African integration, the fact that there are more publications on this issue is a helpful one. More research on this topic will only fuel more debate, which is needed to work toward a solution to improving integration in Africa and finding a solution that is "African."

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4. For definitive works, look at publications by Arthur Hazlewood, Joseph Nye, John Akokpari, and Timothy Murithi.