



## **POLITICAL INTEGRATION AND THE CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE ON CONTINENTAL UNIFICATION IN AFRICA**

Professor E. Ike Udogu  
Dept. of Government & Justice  
Anne Belk Hall  
Appalachian State University  
Boone, NC. 28608  
USA  
udoguei@appstate.edu

### Introduction

In this paper, I shall discuss epistemologically the issue of the complexities that arises from nationalism and political integration; in particular, I will briefly examine these concepts and their philosophies as they relate to Africa's ambition for unification in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In other words, the centrality of the discussion in this essay is on whether nationalism-cum-ethnonationalism<sup>1</sup> might mitigate the momentum toward Africa's unification as imagined and conceived by the African Union and pan-Africanists in this millennium. It is within the general framework of the foregoing postulation that I shall pithily explore the following relational themes:

- Nationalism and integration: the discourse
- Attempts at Regional integration in Africa
- State Weakness and the need for political cohesion
- Conclusion and the way forward

Nationalism, arguably, is a primitive ideology that has its roots in antiquity. Its teachings, implications, practice and power was conducive to the survival of a collectivity from time immemorial. Its values, *inter alia*, were promoted within the framework of group survival and within the context of the sociological theory of in-group and out-group contemplation. Notionally, members of the in-group must be protected since they are part of the family—i.e. they are a sort of children of the in-group as opposed to the children of the out-group that they could be engaged with in commercial intercourse or take on in war to control a source of water or a cattle grazing field, for example.

Universalism, as a supposition antithetical to nationalism, was promoted in the episteme and advocacy of Stoic philosophers. Other forces that bought into the idea of universalism or demonstrated its utility (in a special way) were, among others, the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church, Songhai, Mali, Ghana, Ottoman, British and French empires. The preceding hegemonies may have pursued a worldwide view consciously or by accident. Nevertheless, historically, the collapse of political and religious empires

was displaced by the particularism of national states and church. Against the backdrop of the above assumptions, I shall succinctly examine the seeming antithesis of nationalism and integration.

### **Nationalism and Integration: The Discourse**

The modern dialogue on nationalism, an important ideology in the social sciences is one that will never go away. Even so, at a time when the primordial attachments to nationalism/ethnic nationalism continue to define the attitude of peoples of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere, the European Union and African Union, for instance, are challenging its saliency in or for an integrated organization. The question, however, is whether the idea and powerful force of nationalism will wither away in the quest for African unification? In other words, will the desire for some form of unity among African countries be strong enough so that the citizens of the various nation-states would peel off or modify their allegiance to ethnic, national and political identities and transfer their loyalty to a supranational entity that has been referred to in some quarters as the African common home?

Contemporarily, nationalism is a popular concept in many disciplines (History, political science, sociology, *et cetera*) that attempts to explain citizens' attitude toward a geographic entity and group or both. Perhaps because of its varying interpretation in the literature and discourses on national/political integration, Louis Snyder maintains that the terminology suffers from too many definitions;<sup>2</sup> this was the case even though many of the definitions on nationalism have similar qualities. Elsewhere, he noted, definitionally, that "nationalism is that sentiment of a group or body of people living within a compact or a noncontiguous territory, using a single language or related dialects as a vehicle for common thoughts or feelings, hold a common religious belief, possessing common institutions, traditions, and customs acquired and transmitted during the course of a common history, venerating national heroes, and cherishing a common will for social homogeneity."<sup>3</sup> A. F. K. Organski avows that "it is essentially a strong feeling of personal identification with the collection of people, places, and pattern of behavior that make up a nation and its way of life."<sup>4</sup> Hans Kohn defines nationalism as "a state of mind, in which supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due the nation-state."<sup>5</sup> He further states that a deep attachment to one's native soil, to local traditions and to recognized territorial authorities has existed in varying strength throughout history. Jack Plano and Roy Olton define the term nationalism to mean "the spirit of belonging together, or the popular will that seeks to preserve the identity of a group by institutionalizing it in the form of a state. [Accordingly], nationalism can be intensified by common racial, linguistic, historical and religious ties. It is usually associated with a particular territory..."<sup>6</sup>

Anthony D. S. Smith avers that the major characteristics and attributes of nationalism include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) Humanity is naturally divided into nations; (b) Each nation has its

peculiar character; (c) The source of all political power is the nation, the collective whole; (d) For freedom and self-realization, people must identify with a nation; (e) Nations can only be fulfilled by their own states; (f) Loyalty to the nation-state overrides other loyalties.<sup>7</sup>

Suffice it to say that in all of these definitions, the common thread that links them together is a special sort of loyalty to a particular entity. It is a loyalty that is often furthered by the process of socialization—a procedure that may enhance the group's legitimacy at the sub-national-cum-national levels.

The historical advancements that happened in Africa with the rise and fall of the Mali, Songhai, Ghana, Benin, and other empires—are somewhat akin to those that developed and fell in Europe and the Orient; the histories of these developments have been told and retold by pan-Africanists and other African historians.<sup>8</sup> It is basically the common experience and values of African peoples that probably encouraged proponents of African unification to urge the creation of a Union of African States.<sup>9</sup>

Probably, an exemplary summary of the lessons to be learned from the development of modern nationalism, as a rival supposition to the ideology of integration, are those articulated by John T. Rourke, when he affirmed that:

1. Nationalism is one of the most important factors in international politics. It defines where we put our primary political loyalty, and that is in the nation-state. Today, [arguably] the world is divided and defined by nationalism and nation-state [although the trend appears to have progressed sequentially from universal-ism—nationalism—globalization].
2. This focus [on nationalism] has grown for about five centuries.
3. After WWII, some predicted an end to nationalism, but they were wrong. Today nationalism is stronger, and independence of the Afro-Asian nations has made it even more inclusive.
4. [Ideologically], nationalism has both positive and negative aspects.
5. On the plus side, nationalism has promoted democracy, self-government, economic growth, and social, political, economic diversity and experimentation.
6. On the negative side, nationalism has led to isolationism, feelings of superiority, suspicion of others, jingoism, messianism, and aggressiveness. Nationalism can also cause instability when there is a lack of fit between states and nations. Domestic instability and foreign intervention are often the result of such national instability. Nationalism has also led to a multiplicity of [nonviable] microstates.
7. In a world of transnational global forces and problems, many condemn nationalism as outmoded and perilous. Some even predict its decline and demise. Such predictions are,

however, highly speculative, and nationalism will remain a key element and powerful force in the foreseeable future.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of the above notions, there were optimistic prognoses in the aftermath of WWII that the sovereign states could no longer continue to exist the way it did. In fact, E. H. Carr noted in 1945 that certain trends suggest that nations and international relations were in the process of undergoing clearly definable change. He asserted optimistically that nationalism could survive only as an anomaly and an anachronism in a world that had moved on to other forms of organization.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the development of nuclear weapons, led such a scholar as John Herz to argue that the nation-state could no longer carry out the primary task of protecting the nation and therefore was doomed; [thus, nation-states must “unite” in order to assuage possible collective destruction].<sup>12</sup> Despite the foregoing argumentations, however, nationalism has refused to die; instead there appears to be a resiliency of nationalism and sub-nationalism as sometimes demonstrated in ethnic particularism.

Be that as it may, there are other trends developing toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 21st. World consciousness is slowly developing and the concept of national sovereignty—particularly economic and political sovereignty—is slowly eroding away. In Africa, there are extensive ties, basically through the African Union that are gradually building a regional identity. Indeed, there is a great and impressive assortment of international organizations and transnational corporations, with some supranational characteristics, all of which seem to steadily dilute or mitigate nationalist tendencies and may instinctively shift citizens’ interest toward supra-nationalism. Such a trend could lead to a focus on the need for continental economic and political integration or cohesion.

The question in Africa today, however, is not whether social and economic integration are necessary in their bilateral and multilateral relationships. In truth, these relationships have, historically, been taking place for a long time. The issue, in contemporary discourse, has always been whether the advancement of such close ties could lead to the formation of a permanent structural organization that could lead to the articulation of the common interests of the African community. In short, how successful would the political equation be if these nation-states were to move toward political integration or cohesion by establishing a supranational governing organization and structure to which the various nation-states would transfer their allegiance? But such an arrangement may be complicated in the judgment of the politically privileged actors who are responsible for such a shift and not the least the greater population. This complexity in the move toward supra-nationality is furthered in an examination of some attempts at regional integration as a precursor to continental amalgamation.

### **Attempts at Regional Integration in Africa**

Africa has the largest number of regional cooperation schemes in the world. Indeed, since the 1960s, African leaders recognized that given the distortions, and deformities caused by the colonial experience, the diminutive sizes of their markets, existing low levels of science and technology and lack of measurable industrialization, there was no viable alternative to cooperation in economic and political matters. In spite of this revelation, there has been an enormous gulf between the enthusiasm shown by leaders for setting up new cooperation schemes on the one hand, and the actual implementation of efficacious cooperation agreements on the other. Yet, on paper, commitments have always been spectacular and on the rise. In truth, new schemes seem to be emerging annually<sup>13</sup> but their practicality tends to be thwarted by nationalistic tendencies. To a greater degree, the ineffectiveness of splendid economic blueprints to unite African states flow in part from the weak state-system.

### **State Weakness and the need for political integration/cohesion**

Had the debate surrounding the issues of the contradiction between nationalism and integration been thrashed out successfully, the question of state failure of some African countries would have not come to the fore during the last 50 years or so. Within the nation-state, itself, the political mix between the forces of ethno-nationalism and integration have been combustible, and have in some cases led to state collapse as in Liberia, for example.

In a provocative report published by Club du Sahel in 1995 titled *Preparing for the Future: A Vision of West Africa in the Year 2020*, an important conclusion was reached regarding the character of the region. Under a sub-title "Rethinking the Shape of the West African States" it was suggested that "Sahelian states are too large, sparsely populated, and hard to manage; some coastal states are too small and do not have a critical mass of population."<sup>14</sup> It has been contended that this view implied that the adoption of particular economic and political policies may be fruitless because the overall design of the nation-state is a permanent barrier to development irrespective of policy choice.<sup>15</sup> Within the context of the above conjectures, a continental integration or cohesion might be more useful in promoting and harnessing of resources for the good of African populations. How might Africa proceed in its quest for unification? A concise analysis on the above query will be the focus of the concluding discussion.

### **Conclusion: the way forward.**

In order for Africa to move toward its objective of creating a Union of African States, they should emphasize continental political and economic integration; indeed, this argument represents the heart of this discourse that has been couched in, or explained within, Africa's quest for incorporation.

In light of the drive toward political cohesion (as a substitute for the less malleable concept of political integration), Sam E. Oyovbaire noted that, descriptively, “cohesion means simply the existence of a normative or value basis for people to keep together—a tendency or demonstrated willingness to hold together in order to maintain and foster complementary interests in existence as a community. Therefore, unlike political integration, political cohesion does not presume harmonized or integrated interests...indeed, political cohesion is simply an acknowledgment of the minimum need to resolve the problems of collective actions in order to achieve some presumed or agreed common goals with an increasing degree of trust and predictability.”<sup>16</sup>

How might the process of political cohesion and continental unification within the framework of a Union of African States be furthered? I argue that it would have to take the collective efforts of major stakeholders—the intelligentsia, civil society and the political class.<sup>17</sup> Africa must at this challenging moment of the “New Globalization” cultivate highly committed transformational leaders who would act within the framework of “symbolic interaction theories.”<sup>18</sup> Symbolic interactionism, according to Barbara Lal, “is a subjectivist sociology that makes the point of view of the actor and his or her *definition of the situation* the central feature of the analysis of collective action.”<sup>19</sup> Our contemporary world has changed significantly from that of our forefathers/mothers by modern sophisticated technology. Africa’s politicians and members of the informed public in particular need to interact resolutely to the reality of the nature of the current global system.

Because leaders can reason—they can understand the character of and problems in Africa’s future and therefore must be prepared to take a chance by unselfishly demonstrating that they are political entrepreneurs capable of proffering adequate solutions to Africa’s economic and political challenges. One of such problems is the region’s marginalization that beckons for a continental unification of sorts; in such a merger, the region could use its abundant natural resources and human capital to catapult the area to its economic and political zenith; and, as a consequence, provide the continent with real clout and zing in world affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Ike Udogu, "National Integration Attempts in Nigerian Politics," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, Vol. 17, No. 1-2 (1990), p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> Louis L. Snyder, *The Meaning of Nationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954), pp. 3-13.

<sup>3</sup> Louis L. Snyder, *Varieties of Nationalism: A Comparative Study* (Hindsdale, Ill: Dryden Press, 1976), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Kohn, *Nationalism, Its Meaning and History* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1965), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Jack Plano and Roy Olton, *The International Relations Dictionary* (Clio, California: ABC-CLIO, 1982), p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony D. S. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth Press, 1971), pp. 20-21; see also Frederick H. Hartman, *The Relations of Nations* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1983), Ch. 2; John T. Rourke, *International Politics on the World Stage* (Guilford, CT: The Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc., 1989), Ch. 6; Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr, *World Politics: The Menu for Choice* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1989), pp. 51-54; Barbara Ward, *Nationalism and Ideology* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1966).

<sup>8</sup> E. Ike Udogu, *Confronting the Challenges and Prospects in the Creation of a Union of African States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New-Castle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 59-96

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85-89

<sup>10</sup> Rourke, *International Politics on the World Stage*, p. 155

<sup>11</sup> Edward H. Carr, *Nationalism and After* (London: Macmillan Press, 1945), p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> John H. Herz, "The Rise and Demise of the Territorial State," *World Politics*, Vol. 9 (1959): 473-493. See also John H. Herz, "The Territorial State Revisited: Reflections on the Future of the Nation-State," in James Rosenau (ed.), *International Relations and Foreign Affairs* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), pp. 76-89.

<sup>13</sup> See "The Formation of a New Economic Community in Southern Africa—the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) in "response to fears that apartheid South Africa may continue to dominate the economy of the area," *United Bank for Africa (UBA): Monthly Business and Economic Digest*, Vol. 15, No. 9 (September 1992): 15.

<sup>14</sup> Club du Sahel, *Preparing for the Future: A Vision of West Africa in the Year 2020* (Paris: Club du Sahel, 1995), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Herbst, "Responding to State Failure in Africa," p. 389.

<sup>16</sup> Sam E. Oyovbaire "Structural Change and Political Process in Nigeria," *African Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 326 (January 1983), p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Udogu, *Confronting the Challenges and Prospects in the Creation of a Union of African States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, P. xii.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Ballis Lal, "Symbolic Interaction Theories," *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (January 1995): 421.

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<sup>19</sup> Lal, "Symbolic Interaction Theories," *American Behavioral Scientist*, pp. 422-423; H. Brotz "Why Sociology is dead," *The Idler*, No. 27 (1990), pp. 35-42.