

Why The African Union Should Be Dismantled And Buried With Gaddafi

Written by S.N. Sangmpam

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S.N. SANGMPAM, DEC 20 2015

Because they want to solve the severe socioeconomic and political underdevelopment of Africa, Pan Africanists have proposed and implemented a continental union that encompasses the whole continent of Africa. From Nkrumah's call for the total unification of Africa to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Union (AU), Africa has differed from South America's and Asia's regional functional integration by its unquenchable thirst for and commitment to an All-Africa union. In the view of Pan Africanists, the development of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is inseparable from that of North Africa. This is not and should not be the case, because SSA socioeconomic outcomes and their causes diverge organically from those of North Africa. As the institutional symbol of this pan-African view, the AU should be dismantled. SSA should be allowed to reconstitute itself, without North Africa, into a self-sustaining, organically integrated Unifederation that can finally address and solve its predicament. Gaddafi's demise allows SSA to attend to this reconstitution.

The Gaddafi episode is instructive. Gaddafi's vocal and militant support for AU and his large financial contribution to the organization are well known. His contribution to the AU annual budget amounted to about one-third of the total. Yet, apart from the initial spontaneous protests of young people in some SSA countries, the overall African reactions to Gaddafi's demise in October 2011 revealed that his investments in AU have not paid off. It is almost a sure bet that after Gaddafi there will be no strong support left for AU in North Africa, let alone in Libya. The lack of payoff for Gaddafi's anchoring support for AU is both a symptom of and a metaphor for the ill conception of AU. It foretells AU's inability, as an institutional format, to meet the goal of solving the SSA socioeconomic predicament.

The Gaddafi episode best alludes to deeper problems that favor the dismantlement of AU. To better grasp these deeper problems, let me first say what they are *not*. First, one oft-mentioned reason for skepticism about building an all-Africa union is the sheer geographical and demographic size of Africa. Skeptics argue that AU cannot manage administratively the whole continent of Africa that lacks infrastructure and efficient bureaucracy. However, this reason lacks strength; it is not why AU should be dismantled. India and China have larger populations than the whole continent of Africa. Yet both have been able to administer their territories with some efficiency. Moreover, the idea of a continental union was born to precisely address the issue of lacking infrastructure in Africa. Lack of infrastructure cannot, therefore, be a deterrent to the continental union.

Second, discontinuation of AU is not because of the five issues generally invoked about the failure of OAU and its auxiliary subregional economic organizations:

- (1) the low level of trade exchange among African countries;
- (2) a plethora of subregional organizations that supersede each other;
- (3) unpaid dues by member states;
- (4) political instability and conflicts, and
- (5) attachment to national sovereignty at the expense of the regional or continental organizations that results in the failure to apply policy agreements.

All five implicitly justified OAU's replacement by AU. By replacing OAU, AU is supposed to solve or to have solved

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these issues. If this were the case, AU would have met its goal. In reality, however, AU cannot and has not been able to solve the five issues. The inability of AU to solve them stems from the fact that these issues are symptoms of deeper problems. Only explaining and solving these deep-rooted problems can help cure the symptoms. The five symptoms are, therefore, not the reason why I propose the dissolution of AU.

A third argument for the dissolution of AU, which is equally not valid, is the difficulties experienced so far by AU. To be sure, AU has experienced problems since its launching in 2002: Budget shortfalls, the non-functioning of some of its agreed-upon institutional organs, mismanagement (such as was revealed by a 2004 audit), conflicts between the AU commission leadership and heads of state, personality clashes among leaders, and diverging visions about the best way to implement the All-Africa political union. Nevertheless, these “growing pains” are to be expected. They do not constitute the reasons why AU should be dismantled.

Fourth, cultural and “racial” differences are not the reason either. Indeed, why AU should be dismantled is not dictated by the fact that North Africa is made of “Arabs” and SSA of “Blacks,” and that the masses of North Africa feel more attached to the Arab world than to “Africa.” Nor is the reason the expected diminishing support for AU in North Africa after Gaddafi. To be sure, there is a “racial” and “cultural” split between North Africa and SSA. Denying it is disingenuous. The split manifests itself in various forms: former President Nasser’s disparaging comments about SSA as the “Dark Continent” to be civilized by Egypt; Gaddafi’s aggressive policy of land grabbing and regime destabilization in SSA in the name of Arab nationalism before his wholesale embrace of a union with SSA; the misgivings and spiteful sentiments of the North Africans, who do not consider themselves “Africans” but “Arabs” and “whites” and, hence, “superior” to people in SSA; and Arab superiority complex and SSA resentment toward Arabs, both by-products of Arab slave trade in SSA.

Nevertheless, this racial and cultural split is not why AU does not meet the requirement as an institutional response to North Africa and SSA. After all, one finds just as many instances of and anecdotes about North Africans proclaiming their African proclivities and connections to SSA. One is reminded of Algeria’s former president Ouari Boumedienne’s retort to the Arabs: “If you force me to choose between the Arab world and Africa, I choose Africa”.

Deeper Reasons

None of these four reasons explains why AU should be dismantled because they are all secondary reasons. They are symptoms of and subordinated to more systemic and organic causes on which SSA and North Africa diverge. AU should be dismantled because it is a mismatch between SSA and North Africa. Indeed, AU is an institution. Institutions do not occur out of the blue. They are made to reflect and respond to a particular situation. From Nkrumah to the proponents of AU, the situation that Pan Africanists have sought to respond to institutionally is the severe socioeconomic and political underdevelopment of Africa. Yet SSA and North Africa do not share the same socioeconomic “situation”. The differential socioeconomic situation of SSA is by now well known. Data clearly show that SSA has lagged behind North Africa and all other developing regions since the 1960s (and not only since the 1970s as often maintained) in such indicators as GDP, life expectancy, infant mortality, poverty change, human development index, and peace index. It is no surprise that SSA is seen as the “poorest region” of the world. And the situation is by no means altered by the recent euphoria about “Africa’s high growth rate,” which is an illusion based on raw materials. Pan Africanists ignore the reality conveyed by these data. Instead, they cling to the idea of a continental African Union.

The cause of the divergence of SSA socioeconomic reality from that of North Africa (and other developing regions) is the difference in the way politics has shaped this reality in both regions. Everything being equal, it is politics and its consequences that allow socioeconomic outcomes to differ from one region to another. Politics also determines institutions. Therefore, with respect to tackling socioeconomic problems, institutions that work best are those that meet one major criterion. They must be tailored to reflect the prevailing brand of politics in society and to respond directly to its socioeconomic consequences. As an All-Africa institution, AU does not meet this requirement with regard to North Africa and SSA. The reason lies in the vast differences in socioeconomic outcomes between North Africa and SSA that politics imposes and why it imposes these differential outcomes. The difference in the politics of the two regions stems from exceptional factors shared by all SSA countries but not by North Africa. These factors

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have the same roots, determine and reinforce each other, and shape politics in all SSA countries in roughly the same way. For this reason, I refer to them as organic causes of politics in SSA.

What are these organic causes or factors that impose an imprint on politics in SSA (and, hence, its socioeconomic situation)? There are four exceptional factors. One starts with SSA geocology. It is overwhelmingly negative and more taxing on people than North Africa's (and other developing regions') despite the presence of the Sahara Desert in North Africa. Much of it derives from the fact that SSA is the most tropical of all the developing regions. For example, SSA holds the first rank in all tropical diseases. Exceptional geocology generated three exceptional intermediary factors. The three intermediate factors more directly cause politics in SSA to differ from politics in North Africa and other developing regions, even though all developing regions share the same type of overpoliticized state.

The first intermediate factor is tribal dispersal and profusion. Geoecological constraints caused a higher dispersal, profusion, and number of tribes in SSA than in North Africa and the two other developing regions of Asia and South America. There are about 4600 tribes in SSA. North Africa (minus Western Sahara and Mauritania), by contrast, counts about 96 tribes, most of which are Berber. SSA has about 48 times the number of tribes of North Africa. Tribal dispersal and profusion caused tribal horizontality. Tribal horizontality assumes equality among tribal groups. It differs from "ethnic" verticality in North Africa (and in Asia and South America), where one "ethnic" group (e.g., Arabs in North Africa) dominates all other groups. In tribal horizontality in SSA, by contrast, political power *is* potentially accessible to all tribal groups. The second geoecology-generated intermediate factor is slavery. Geoecology contributed in a profound way to slavery and slave trade in SSA. Although slavery has existed in almost all continents, slavery in SSA was exceptional. It was the largest forced migration in modern history. Its impact was felt in all continents, except Oceania. And its effects have persisted up to the 21st century.

The link between this exceptional nature of slavery and geoecology has been shown. Because of slavery, a higher level of insecurity and inferiority complex characterizes the SSA political leadership than is the case in North Africa (and Asia and South America). The third exceptional intermediate factor is fragile traditional economic organizations. SSA geoecology, tribal dispersal, and slavery played a determinant role in this fragility. By 1960 SSA economic outputs (in GDP), derived from both precolonial and colonial periods, were lower than those of North Africa (and Asia and South America). Due to the fragile traditional economies and lower economic outputs, a more extreme form of socioeconomic deprivation dominates political competition in SSA than in North Africa and the two other developing regions. The three intermediate factors, their attendant tribal horizontality, extreme socioeconomic deprivation, and insecurity-stricken political leadership deeply structure and shape politics in SSA. Although North Africa (and the two other developing regions) shares the same type of overpoliticized state as SSA, the three phenomena lend to SSA politics a more Hobbesian and exceptional character.

This exceptional character explains why in SSA the institutions of the state have been more predatory and viciously appropriated by some groups or individuals—often and almost always tied up to tribal claims and interests; why extreme forms of political buffoonery verging on sadism have occurred there (e.g., Idi Amin, Bokasa, Doe, Abacha); why SSA has brewed more civil wars than any other developing region; why it has a higher political strife index and lower peace index than the other developing regions (as a historically concurrent and multistate "revolution", the "Arab Spring" is not considered here in the comparison); why in the "consolidated democracy era," SSA has witnessed the larger number of military coups and coup attempts (e.g., Mauritania, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Niger, Mali, Central African Republic, and coup attempts in Benin, Malawi, South Sudan, and Congo-Kinshasa); and why there are more so-called "failed states" in SSA than in the other developing regions.

The viciously Hobbesian character of politics in SSA prevents the state from acting as the normal institution through which public policies are taken to tackle the problems of security, welfare, and socioeconomic development. To be sure, SSA shares the causes of "Third World underdevelopment" with North Africa and the other regions. However, the cumulative impact of this exceptional politics on the state explains the persistent and widening gap in socioeconomic outcomes between SSA and North Africa (and Asia and South America). Like its causes, SSA socioeconomic lag is organic, that is, it applies in roughly the same way to all SSA countries.

Unifederation as Institutional Response

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What, then, is the institutional format that can provide an equivalent organic response to SSA socioeconomic lag? This brings me back to the point made earlier about institutions. Institutions reflect and respond to specific situations. Institutions that work best are those that are tailored to reflect the prevailing brand of politics in society and to respond directly to its socioeconomic consequences. Therefore, the institution apt to solve SSA socioeconomic predicament needs to reflect and respond to the organic differential causes and consequences of SSA politics. The common pitfall of Pan Africanists is to be oblivious of the specifically organic nature of the SSA predicament and its differences from North Africa's situation. Likewise, those who defend individual country-based solutions in the hope of having some SSA countries become "the next China or South Korea" are equally oblivious to the organic reality of the SSA predicament.

This organic difference requires the administrative and political separation of SSA from North Africa—hence the dissolution of AU. It cries out for the urgent need to organically tackle the predicament for SSA as a separate whole. Institutionally, the separation can be accomplished only through a successor institution to AU. Such successor institution must be tailored to best respond to the organic causes and consequences of SSA exceptionally Hobbesian politics. The *state*, the institution through which public policies are devised to tackle the problems of socioeconomic development, should be such successor institution. The reason is because the state in SSA is the direct institutional consequence of the exceptionally Hobbesian brand of politics. Through it are generated extremely negative socioeconomic outcomes. To make SSA socioeconomic situation positive, the direct institutional response to this brand of politics is a different type of state. Indeed, although the state and its institutions are made and determined by politics, the state and its institutions mould politics in return. The SSA situation rests on a paradox. The causes of exceptional politics and its negative impact on the state and on socioeconomic outcomes are organically regional and applicable to SSA as a whole; yet the states themselves are "national" and "sovereign." The challenge is to make the state as regionally organic as the causes of exceptional politics. This would allow the state to mould politics positively in return for SSA as a whole. Such a revolutionary transformation of the state, which makes it the center of decisions for the whole SSA, requires that the national state lose its sovereignty in favor of a SSA-centered state. The loss of national sovereignty is, thus, a direct consequence of the organic causes of politics in SSA. It is not artificially and arbitrarily imposed.

In contrast to the European Union model copied by AU and the generally loose and functional integrative model that guides most regional integrations, SSA must consequently rely on a tight integrative model that reflects its organic exceptionalism. A tight integrative model assumes unique sovereignty of the integrative state as opposed to multiple sovereignties of the constitutive states. It rests on rearranging the SSA political space that dismantles the highly "negative" national state to allow its transformation into a SSA positive organic state. Resorting to a neologism, I refer to this successor institution as a *Unifederation*. By Unifederation I mean a reconfigured and unified political and territorial body. Its local and subregional entities make no claim to complete sovereignty as in AU and as in other regional groupings in the world. They do not claim complete but progressively delegated sovereignty as in European Union. Nor is their claim about "residual sovereignty," which is the source of interpretative frictions between the federal government and the states in the US. Rather, local and subregional entities are decentralized under the complete and unified sovereignty of a newly constituted SSA multi-territorial state. Unlike other regional groupings, in which institutional decisions are either not binding or loosely and selectively binding, the new institutions attached to the SSA organic state impose sovereign and constraining obligations to all members. It also means that territorial borders separating the previously sovereign countries lose their meaning as a new geo-spatial space is created.

Unifederation involves four payoffs:

- (1) a unique political framework for tackling SSA socioeconomic lag;
- (2) a better democratization process, as it creates conditions for compromise;
- (3) elimination of the conditions that breed strife by democratizing the rearranged SSA space and by standing as the collective center of sovereign decisions;
- (4) a solution for the acute insecurity and inferiority complex of the SSA political leadership thanks to the resultant

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socioeconomic payoffs and the elimination of the conditions that contribute to the complex.

The continental unification of Africa, which includes North Africa and SSA, as proposed by Pan Africanists is a pipe dream because it will never solve the SSA lagging socioeconomic situation. Unifederation, by contrast, is not a pipe dream because it squarely addresses this lag. Its feasibility is made easier by SSA suffering masses' thirst for rational solutions that move them away from the "poorest region" status; by the democratic gains of the last twenty years; and by globalization's advances in communication, economic activities, and erosion of the national state.

As high as the hurdles faced by the implementation of a SSA Unifederation may seem, they are by far more salutary for SSA than the "growing pains" of AU, which will never eliminate the gap between SSA and the other developing regions. SSA faces two choices. The first is the status quo and its attendant perpetual lowest ranking for SSA. And the second is the implementation of a salutary intellectual alternative for a positive transformation. The difference between these two options can be measured. Ask the best statisticians in the world to gather all the available data. Let them calculate the human, economic, financial, political and psychological costs of maintaining the status quo represented by AU and SSA today. Then look at the cost of implementing the alternative in the form of a Unifederation. There is no doubt that the cost of the status quo for SSA is exponentially higher than the cost of implementing the salutary alternative.

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