Of Integracidaires and the Contemporary Publics of Continental Integration in Africa

By:

Babatunde Fagbayibo

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Introduction

In an essay published in 2002, the late Kenyan scholar, Ali Mazrui, asked the critical question of who killed democracy in Africa. In his archetypal incisive take on African issues, Ali Mazrui delved into history to identify both internal and external forces that have conspired to commit the crime of "*democra-cide* ". Suffice to say that although the political dynamics of the continent has evolved, many of the culprits mentioned by Ali Mazrui are still busy at the slaughter slab, shredding democracy into bits.

Unfortunately, for the African masses, democracy is not the only object of mutilation. The idea of deepening regional integration in Africa has not missed the sharpened machete of the butchers of democracy. Either because of stifling democratic rights or a bold-faced insistence to rubbish integration programmes,

Africa's regional integration has remained paralytic. The *Integracidaires* are those who, through commission or omission, revel in the idea of ensuring that the simple logic of achieving African unity remains ossified in a mystic bubble. However, there are contemporary publics that continue to ensure that the many obstacles are not enough to dampen the mood and drive towards deepening African integration.

Who are the *Integracidaires*?

Before discussing the contemporary publics, it is important to first identify the so called *Integracidaires*. The *Integracidaires* consist of several internal and external actors whose actions contribute to the dysfunctional state of regionalism on the continent. In no particular order of importance, below are the suspects:

a) "Follow-Follow" integrationists: This group consists of African political elites, scholars, and European Union (EU) policy makers and thinkers who are unable to envision African integration process outside of the European integration template. This cohort stubbornly refuses to appreciate the different contexts and variables that inform both integrative experiments. At both the continental and sub-regional levels, institutions, normative policies and integrative steps mirror that of the EU. In this equation, the EU sees itself as the mentor and propagator of the gospel of the correct model for regional integration. For African regional organisations, this "Follow-Follow" or copycat approach has led to a conundrum, with little or no room to manoeuvre, and more importantly pursue a truly Afrocentric integration process.

b) External funders and their not-so-altruistic objectives: The inability or unwillingness of member states to finance regional institutions paved the way for external funders to fill the wide vacuum. External funders such as the EU use this as a manipulative tool for influencing regional integration in Africa. Similarly, it was alleged that between 2012 and 2017, China bugged the same computer server it donated to the AU. Recent AU efforts regarding self-financing through a 2% levy on eligible imports and the adoption of the nine golden rules on financial management are steps aimed at reversing this. While some AU member states have started collecting the 0.2% levy on imports, 30 member states are yet to implement the rule.

c) Autocratic regimes: The state of democratic governance in Africa remains worrisome. While some countries on the continent have made some progress in this respect, there is an increasing shift towards anti-democratic About 11 AU member states have so far adopted draconian laws to constrain non-governmental organisation and opposition activities. In addition to this are measures targeted at weakening the powers and relevance of national institutions such as the election management bodies (EMBs), legislature, the judiciary. These actions not only violate continental and regional norms on democratic governance but further delegitimises national institutions as viable structures for the implementation of regional integration objectives.

d) Cold-feet integrationists: Non-compliance with integrative objectives remain a key hinderance. The report on the institutional reform of the AU noted that while over 1,500 resolutions have been adopted by the organisation, an effective follow up mechanism on implementation is lacking. Member states routinely violate transnational normative rules and display unwillingness to transfer powers to regional organisations. In addition to this is the political backlash, in the form of withdrawal or push for disbandment, against adjudicative regional organs that have delivered judgments against member states.

Another dimension of this is the scourge of Afrophobia. Cases of violent attacks against black foreigners; government policies aimed at excluding black foreigners from access to employment and other socio-economic benefits; and political elites inciting the populace against black foreigners all weaken the quest for deeper integration.

The contemporary publics

While *Integracidaires* continue to frustrate the advancement and deepening of regional integration efforts in Africa, there is a cohort of contemporary publics that are providing counter-narratives through progressive and positive actions. This is composed of activists, civil society organisations (CSOs), research institutions, dedicated transnational bureaucrats, artists, and the private sector. These publics are not necessarily working as a unit or engaged in formal collaborations but are driven by the zeal for concretising African unity. In no particular order of importance, below are some of the actors and their

contributions to the pan-African unity discourse:

a) Africa Inc.: Big businesses and entrepreneurs are increasingly taking interest in investments that speak to the pan-African unity vision. One such initiative is the AfroChampions Initiative, a public-private partnership jointly chaired by former South African president Thabo Mbeki and Aliko Dangote (Africa's richest man), aimed at raising funds for the effective operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This initiative has proposed a US$1 trillion investment framework for projects such as the Djibouti to Dakar railway and the Democratic Republic of Congo's Inga Dam. In 2018, AfroChampions committed USD1 million to awareness campaign on AfCFTA. Another initiative is the Tony Elumelu Entrepreneurship Programme (TEEP), championed by the Nigerian businessman, Tony Elumelu, with a seed capital of USD100 million. The aim is to fund 10,000 African start-ups over 10 years, 1,000 start-ups per year, with the intention of creating 1 million new jobs and USD10 billion in annual revenue for Africa's economy. Other private sector initiatives that are targeted at enhancing regionalism exist in East, Southern and West.

b) The rhythm of unity: The music industry - with its artists, satellite TV channels, and award shows - is fast becoming the referential soundtrack for advancing the gospel of deeper continental integration in Africa. African music artists have not only become global brands but also pushing the ideology of closer unity through collaborations, using their voices to promote the importance of unity, and contributing to the conscientisation of Africa's youthful population about the benefits of a borderless Africa.

c) Committed "Africrats": Despite the unwillingness of African leaders to transfer meaningful powers to regional institutions, there are dedicated transnational technocrats that are focused on providing technical and strategic policy support to the cause of regional integration in Africa. Thomas Tieku referred to this group of technocrats as "Africrats", and they are behind the articulation of reform efforts, strategic policy documents, capacity building programmes, and negotiations at the continental and sub-regional levels. Outside of the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) structures, there are also committed "Africrats" working on regional integration issues in institutions such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), African Development Bank (AfDB), and the African Export-Import Bank

(Afreximbank). These institutions sometime collaborate with the AU on projects and programmes. Also, “Africrats” often work closely with civil society actors in designing normative and policy documents on regional integration.

d) Proactive CSOs: CSOs have made immense contributions to driving the agenda and implementation of regional integration objectives in Africa. Interestingly, these proactive stance of CSOs often exist outside the formal AU structure that is dedicated to civil society, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC). This is due to several limitations such as ECOSOCC’s lack of funds, exclusionary membership criteria of ECOSOCC, AU’s arbitrary determination of which CSO to invite to meetings, and legitimacy problem of some of the CSOs that are part of ECOSOCC.

CSOs involvement in the continental integration range from providing consultancy services, agenda setting initiatives and awareness drive. Organisations such as Institute of Security Studies (ISS), Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes in Africa (ACCORD) have on different occasions supported the AU in crafting policy documents on peace and security, human rights, democracy, good governance, and elections. There are other organisations involved in reporting and providing critical comments on AU activities around human rights, trade and good governance. CSOs also play an active role in the adjudicative arena of continental integration by providing reliable information on human right abuses in member states, submitting cases to the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and fact checking the periodic reports submitted by member states to the Commission. Similarly, there are research institutes and educational institutions actively engaged in organising seminars, conferences and teaching and research on Africa’s regional process.

Which way forward?

Continental integration is bedevilled by the huge gap between rhetoric and action. Despite the many laws and policies on regional integration, the requisite commitment to implement these norms remain lacking. Current developments regarding AU reforms provide another opportunity for making meaningful progress. However, achieving this will require an overhaul of the ideational

approach to continental integration. The obsessive state-centric approach to regional integration, which ensures that civil society is marginalised and excluded from the integrative process and the non-transference of assertive powers to regional organs, is not compatible with the aspirational goals of enhanced regional integration.

This will require a conscious and pragmatic approach of channelling the various activities of civil society in advancing continental integration into the AU process. In addition, the transfer of meaningful powers to regional organs such as the AU Commission and the Pan African Parliament (PAP) will require nuanced and strategic measures that looks beyond the conundrum of expecting all 55 AU member states to be onboard. One measure will be a flexible approach that allows able and willing member states, and RECs, to proceed with special arrangements of transferring supranational competence to these organs. Lastly, the promotion and protection of fundamental rights must be re-centred and prioritised as an essential ingredient of continental integration.

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