

The Roadblocks to a United Africa

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21-April-2005
HST 392

"We charge you with the responsibility to lead our peoples and Continent into the new world of the next century - which must be an African Century - during which all our people will be freed of the bitterness born of the marginalization and degradation of our proud continent of Africa." Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, speaking about the need to unify the continent of Africa at an Organization for African Unity summit in 1998. At this time, Africa is bound loosely through this organization, the Organization for African Unity, whose underlying goal is to serve as the cornerstone to African unity. Such a goal has faced difficult paths, however, as Africa was at one time occupied by European powers, including Belgium, France, Germany and Great Britain. Almost all of Africa, excluding three sovereign nations, was occupied by a European power at one time. Reviewing the history of Africa will reveal the underlying difficulties of creating a unified Africa, from reliance on former colonial powers to the influences of the "Great Powers" during the Cold War; the goal of a united Africa faces an uphill battle.

Europe annexed Africa through her colonization efforts in the 1800s. The land grab changed the way Africa would be known on the continent and throughout the world. Her ways would be changed forever to closely match the every day lives of the Europeans, much like the rest of the world. Africa

would be intertwined and dependent upon Europe for its development, something that was only to benefit Europe at times. "The major powers - Spain and Portugal, and later Britain, Holland and France - had created a world division of labor between themselves, the 'center' of the world system, and their colonial territories in the 'periphery'" (Russett 447). In this system, the entire industrial base was at the "center" and the colonies provided food and raw materials. Once these colonies became independent, most maintained close ties with the world economic system, meaning they continued in the trend of producing goods and exporting primary commodities. Europe had brought to Africa currency, trading, everything that was taking place in Europe excluding the benefits of being a citizen of one of these nations. Any development that could take place in Africa was based upon a grand scheme to in reality benefit the European colonizers. Africa would produce and ship the raw material to the mother country, while the mother country would sell the finished product back to the Africans. This created reliance upon the mother country for most products while the African colony would not be self-sufficient.

As we progress through time, most African countries are still stuck in their exporting ways, without the financial ability to become self-reliant like their colonizers. It is

for this reason that many nations in Africa are financially in debt, as exports of primary commodities do not give sufficient funding to provide all the needs and services for their populations. "In the view of some radical theorists, less developed countries dependent on the world market face great obstacles in developing advanced, diversified economies" (Russett 448). The gap continues to widen because of the dependency of these nations to the richer Europeans and Western powers. Without an infrastructure, most African countries are forced to remain part of the status-quo in such a situation.

The decolonization of Africa by the European powers occurred in several ways, including peaceful and violent means. Some of the decolonization took place prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, including the independence for Liberia, the Union of South Africa and Egypt. However, the process of decolonization came to a halt with the Second World War, where the allied powers needed the resources of her colonies. "With Britain, France, Italy, and Belgium's economies and infrastructures in need of rebuilding, having overseas sources of cheap labor, commodities, and captive markets must have seemed invaluable" (Gilbert 324). Such notions, "sources of cheap labor, commodities, and captive markets" placed a hold on the decolonization efforts of

Africa. While the European powers, to some extent, were making attempts to change how the colonies were run and managed, the fact remained that they were not independent. "At the close of World War II, Britain and France seemed to hope that a 'middle-ground' approach to colonial policy might maintain for them the economic benefits of colonialism while offsetting the ideological disadvantages that the system suddenly seemed to pose in a world increasingly unfriendly to colonial rule" (Gilbert 325). While the colonizers were making attempts to continue to "rule" their overseas possessions, the colonizers were increasingly becoming restless with them.

The independence movement came in waves for the African colonies, starting with the three prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, and following the war. The process was slow moving, one to two nations a year starting in 1956 with Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. The major wave came in 1960, dubbed the "Year for Africa" as 17 nations gained independence from their European colonizers. The final year for independence came in 1993 for Eritrea. Independence was met with joy and jubilation by the Africans. "Across most of Africa, the coming of independence was heralded with great joy and high expectations" (Gilbert 339). Along with these high expectations was the dream of a united Africa that would be a

powerful force on the planet, one to counter even the United States or their former European colonizers.

The notion of "Pan-Africanism" spurred out of a dream to unify all of Africa. The term itself, "Pan-Africanism" refers to "various movements in Africa that have as their common goal the unity of Africans and the elimination of colonialism and white supremacy from the continent," according to a definition from encyclopedia.com. This idea started in 1900, with the goal of gradual self-rule from the European powers. Of course, several competing factions across the continent had different ideas on how the goal could be achieved. Malcolm X stated "The road forward is to complete the liberation of both Continental and Diasporan Africans based on the common Pan-African goals of self-determination, right to development, land and reparations. The fight to implement these goals must be rooted in the context of our concrete convictions" (Pan 65). Ideological differences however slowed the progress of achieving the grand dream of a unified Africa. At its onset, two competing factions emerged with varying goals and vision for African unity. On one side, the "Casablanca Group" emerged with Morocco, Ghana, Egypt, Mali and Guinea. On the other side, the "Monrovia Group" emerged, with had a membership of 19 states, including Liberia, Nigeria and

Madagascar. The difference between the two was largely ideological.

The Casablanca Grouping was considered the radicals with regards to a united Africa. Within this grouping, member states wanted to see nonalignment due to the Cold War. "The Casablanca Group advocated nonalignment in the Cold War, strenuously protested continued influence on the continent ... and advocated a single African government at the earliest possible date" (Gilbert 341). This grouping wanted to move the idea of a united Africa to the fast track. On the other side, the Monrovia Grouping wanted to continue to receive aid from their former colonial rulers for the time being, effectively placing them during the Cold War in the "western camp." "Although the Monrovia states were not entirely opposed to the concept of African unity, their leaders tended to stress that such a goal was not realistic in the short run" (Gilbert 341). The most prevalent difference in opinion between the two groups was the timing of African unity, and also the alliance structure. As can be seen, one group sided with the west, and the other group, the Casablanca group, tended to side with the east.

Finally, after several years, a new body was created called the Organization of African Unity. "These antagonistic groups were only dissolved by the formation in 1963 of the

Organization of African Unity (OAU) - the first attempt to make real the vision of a united Africa" (Rajab 1). The purpose of this new organization was not what every member wanted out of a united Africa, but it was a giant step forward, to some. However, for others, who wanted to see a Continental Army, the OAU was not a united Africa. "For much of its existence, though, the OAU had, in effect, acted as the 'trade union of the African heads-of-state,' to quote Tanzania's first President, the late Julius Nyerere, one of the organization's founding fathers" (Pan 2). The OAU started as a compromise to a dream, a united Africa. It was a starting block that was realized with the help of the two competing blocks, the Casablanca group and the Monrovia group.

A united Africa has faced numerous roadblocks to seeing its realization. For its part, the new Africa Union is a dream come true, taking over for the Organization of African Unity. Some may argue that had the Europeans not colonized and changed the boundaries of Africa, a united Africa would not be seen today. Others may content it is the Europeans who have caused the turmoil of Africa. "Only a United New Africa can bring about stability and ensure that the vast resources of Africa are primarily used for the benefit of the people of Africa and not the opposite, which has been the case from the colonial times to date" (Chimutengwende 12).

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