

## THE OAU: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FUNCTION, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF THE ORGANIZATION

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THE ORGANIZATION OF African Unity (OAU) is the contemporary embodiment and the vehicle of the mode of political consciousness historically referred to as Pan-Africanism. As a historical phenomenon, Pan-Africanism has already been the subject of extensive research and writing by various scholars.<sup>1</sup> There are also accounts of Pan-Africanism by those historical figures who were directly involved in the movement.<sup>2</sup>

A fruitful appraisal of the functions, problems and prospects of the OAU is possible only with a sound grasp of the historical background leading to the inception of the Organization in 1963. There have been several tentative definitions of Pan-Africanism, each laying particular emphasis on some political, cultural or racial element. As a broad working definition we shall refer to Pan-Africanism as that historical phenomenon and mode of consciousness consisting of three major characteristics:

An intellectual and political outlook among African and Afro-Americans who regard or have regarded Africans and people of African descent as homogeneous. This outlook leads to a feeling of racial solidarity and a new self-awareness and causes Afro-Americans to look upon Africa as their real 'homeland', without necessarily thinking of a physical return to Africa.

All ideas which have stressed or have sought the cultural unity and political independence of Africa. The key concepts here have been 'the redemption of Africa' and 'Africa for the Africans'.

Ideas or political movements which have advocated or do advocate the political unity of Africa or at least political collaboration in one form or another.

Pan-Africanism before 1945 had two major strands. First, there was the Pan-Africanist radical tradition represented by Marcus Aurelius Garvey.<sup>3</sup> This can be traced back to 1920 in New York when Garvey founded his 'Negro

<sup>1</sup> Some of the major works on Pan-Africanism are: S.O. Mezu (ed.), *The Philosophy of Pan-Africanism* (Washington DC, Georgetown Univ. Press, 1965); American Society of African Culture, *Pan-Africanism Reconsidered* (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1962); I. Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement* (London, Methuen, 1974); V.B. Thompson, *Africa and Unity* (London, Longmans, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, G. Padmore (ed.), *Colonial and Coloured Unity, A Programme of Action: History of the Pan-African Congress* (Manchester, Panaf Services, 1947).

<sup>3</sup> See A. Garvey (ed.), *Marcus Garvey: Philosophy and Opinions* (New York, Universal Publishing House, 1926).

Empire' and attracted millions of Afro-Americans with such slogans as 'Africa for the Africans', 'Back to Africa' and 'Renaissance of the Black Race'. The vehicle for his programme of action was the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and his grandiose plans included the setting up of the Black Star Line which was to carry his followers back to their 'home' in Africa. None of his schemes came to tangible fruition but he did, within a relatively short period, succeed in stimulating among millions of people in the United States awareness of a community of interests and goals binding all Black people both in the New World and in Africa. Subsequently, for instance, one of the latter-day protagonists of Pan-Africanism, Dr Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, acknowledged that he derived tremendous inspiration from the writings of Marcus Garvey.<sup>4</sup>

A second Pan-Africanist tradition was established by William Burghardt du Bois, who rejected Garvey's populism, his 'back to Africa' approach, and applied himself to the removal of racial discrimination in the New World and agitated for the right of peoples of Africa to national independence. It was du Bois who was the moving spirit behind the holding of five Pan-African Congresses between 1919 and 1945. In the last of these Congresses, held in Manchester in 1945, there was an unprecedented African presence, and among the delegates were young men like Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah, who later played leading roles in the anti-colonial struggles in their respective countries.

Before 1945 the Pan-African movement was led by Afro-Americans and West Indians. After 1945 it became an African-led movement, though it lost some of its earlier vitality and its leading personalities went back to Africa to participate in the struggles for independence. One can safely say that after 1945 Kwame Nkrumah became the most energetic, consistent and articulate exponent of Pan-Africanism. Even as he engaged in the struggle for national independence in 1953 he organized a conference in Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti, which was intended to be a sixth Pan-African Congress. But apart from Nnamdi Azikiwe and a few other Nigerian representatives, only three observers appeared from Liberia, and the resultant National Congress of West Africa was a fiasco.

With the achievement of independence by Ghana, George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah continued to use that territory as the base for the attainment of Pan-Africanist goals. In 1958 the Accra Conference of eight independent African countries (Ethiopia, Liberia, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan and Ghana) was held. It condemned colonialism and apartheid in South Africa and pledged moral support for the Algerian Revolution. The 1958 Accra Conference was the first gathering of independent African states and it set the tone for the ensuing Organization of African Unity. It was a gathering of Heads of State and

<sup>4</sup> K. Nkrumah, *Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (Edinburgh, Thomas Nelson, 1957), 27.

Government, it condemned colonialism and racism, and pledged support for national liberation struggles. At the end of 1958 the first All-African People's Conference was held, also in Accra. It placed itself consciously in the Pan-African tradition and some regard it as the sixth Pan-African Congress.

### THE BIRTH OF THE OAU

An analysis of events on the African scene immediately before the 1963 Addis Ababa conference is necessary in order to comprehend some of the inner tensions which bedevilled the Organization soon after its inception. One major development in 1958, as we saw, was the participation in the first conference of independent African states of both the 'Black' and the 'Arab' states. The 'Black-Arab' dimension has ever since become an important factor in the efficacy or non-efficacy, in the cohesion or non-cohesion, of the OAU.

The year 1960 was the 'year of Africa', and approximately one half of the continent became politically independent. Besides the Arab countries, there were the Anglophone and the new Francophone states, thereby creating another potential area of tension. An objective analysis will show that some of the problems which confront the OAU had their roots in the period before the inception of the Organization in 1963. The Congo crisis, for instance, provided one of the earliest opportunities to put African cohesiveness to the test, and to expose serious contradictions among the new states, as they took opposing positions on this and several other issues. The immediate consequence was to split Africa into two blocs. Thus the beginning of 1961 saw the formation of the progressive Casablanca group, which had a dynamic anti-imperialist posture,<sup>5</sup> as well as the birth of the conservative Monrovia-Brazzaville group, which was vacillating on vital issues of decolonization and whipped up a lot of anti-communist and anti-socialist sentiments.<sup>6</sup> It was the merger of these two blocs which resulted in the birth of the OAU in 1963.

### THE GREAT COMPROMISE

We can now see that the foundation of the OAU in Addis Ababa under the leadership of the conservative, feudal but prestigious Ethiopia was at that time equivalent to a great compromise. In the interests of unity and the emergence of one continental organization, Kwame Nkrumah, who had emerged as the most articulate spokesman of the radical wing of Pan-Africanism, temporarily suspended his far-reaching campaign for 'Union Government for Africa'. He had

<sup>5</sup> The Casablanca Group comprised three Arab and three Black African governments: Morocco (a monarchy which pursued conservative domestic policies), the FLN revolutionary government in Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea and Mali.

<sup>6</sup> The Monrovia-Brazzaville Group consisted of: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Dahomey, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Malagasy Republic, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Upper Volta.

envisaged a political union 'along the lines of the USA or the USSR'.<sup>7</sup> The conservative wing found a spokesman in the 'moderate' Prime Minister of Nigeria, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. He stated,

Some of us have suggested that African unity should be achieved by political fusion of the different states in Africa; some of us feel that African unity could be achieved by taking practical steps in economic, educational, scientific and cultural co-operation and by trying first to get Africans to understand themselves before embarking on the more complicated and more difficult arrangement of political union. My country stands for the practical approach to the unity of the African continent.<sup>8</sup>

It was a great compromise because the decision of the 1963 conference, it should be noted, did not mean an outright repudiation of political union as a long-term goal. Nkrumah later hailed the establishment of the OAU as a significant landmark on the long road to a Union of African States.

#### PURPOSES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE OAU

An objective and comprehensive evaluation of the problems confronting and the prospects before the OAU is only possible by juxtaposing the objectives that the OAU set out to accomplish and the principles which it laid down as its cherished institutional values. The aims, objectives, or goals of the OAU, along with the principles, are enshrined in the OAU Charter.

Briefly, the OAU has five purposes: the promotion of African unity; the achievement of a better life for the people of Africa; the defence of the sovereignty of the African states; the eradication of all forms of colonialism from Africa; and the promotion of international co-operation having due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also explicitly spelt out that in pursuit of these purposes, the African states solemnly affirm their adherence to the following principles: the sovereign equality of all member states; non-interference in the internal affairs of states; respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each member state and its inalienable right to independent existence; peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration; unreserved condemnation of political assassination as well as of subversive activities on the part of neighbouring states or any other states; absolute dedication to the total emancipation of the African territories which are still dependent; affirmation of a policy of non-alignment with regard to all blocs.

An evaluation of the problems and prospects facing the Organization is possible not only through the yardstick of the aims and principles as enunciated by the Organization, but also by an appraisal of the structural and procedural

<sup>7</sup> See Mezu, *The Philosophy of Pan-Africanism*, 65.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

constraints which face it. The Charter provides that its aims are to be achieved through four main institutions and a number of specialized commissions. The main institutions are the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, which is the supreme organ of the OAU and has an essentially deliberative function; the Council of Ministers, which has an essentially executive function and is charged with the obligation to implement decisions taken by the Assembly; the General Secretariat, comprising a Secretary-General and one or more Assistant Secretaries-General, which is answerable to the Organization; as well as a Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration. The Charter also provides for the creation of specialized commissions in various spheres of possible African co-operation. There is a growing feeling that the structure and procedures established in 1963 no longer adequately respond to the exigencies of today, and a review of the Charter should aim at reforming obsolete structures and procedures with a view to sharpening the cutting-edge of the Organization and making it more effective in solving Africa's contemporary problems.

#### PROBLEMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE OAU

In examining the OAU one cannot escape the conclusion that there is a credit side as well as a debit side. This balanced approach is absolutely necessary in order, on the one hand, to seriously and objectively appraise the real problems and failures of the Organization and, on the other hand, to counter the growing morbid pessimism and despondency in some quarters on the question of the future of the Organization. The OAU membership currently stands at fifty states; but for controversy, the admission of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic would have brought the membership to fifty-one states, whose peoples are Arab and Black, and whose political, economic and administrative legacies from the different colonizing powers are diverse. The large membership proves at times to be rather unwieldy and has its own problems as the leaders always try to reach definite positions by consensus, rather than by majority vote.

The Black-Arab dimension shows within the OAU in what the late President Gamel Abdul Nasser described as 'Egypt's concentric circles: the Islamic, Arab, and African'. Thus in addition to their membership of the OAU, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Somalia and Tunisia are also members of the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.<sup>9</sup> This situation makes for a conflict of loyalties and Black Africa has from time to time nursed suspicions that some of the OAU member states let OAU affairs come second to those of the Arab world.

<sup>9</sup> Egypt has not been a member since 1978 but, under the leadership of Hosni Mubarak, it is likely that it will be readmitted to full membership of these organizations.

There is a further ideological division within this Arab grouping which results in contradictions not only within this Arab entity but also within the OAU as a whole. Egypt, formerly the champion of socialism, Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism and Non-Alignment, is now firmly anchored in the American, and therefore capitalist, camp; and this is true, too, of the once quasi pro-Soviet Somalia and Sudan. Morocco and Tunisia, which are also in this camp, are consistently pro-Western, although Morocco once enjoyed a brief period as part of the radical Pan-Africanist Casablanca group. Libya and Algeria, on the other hand, are members of the 'Steadfastness Front', and, although the latter is a consistently radical member of the OAU, the former is very mercurial, being consistent only in its anti-American stance.

Notwithstanding a plethora of Black-Arab contradictions, one should be able to identify areas of solidarity and identity. The Organization has survived for more than twenty years. Blacks and Arabs espouse the aims, objectives and principles of the OAU Charter. They assert commitment to the total liberation of Southern Africa and Palestine. They reaffirm their determination to enhance Africa's economic betterment and self-upliftment through the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos of 1981. The points tending for unity are stronger than the disintegrative elements. During the nineteenth Summit held in Addis Ababa in 1983 it was agreed that the OAU Secretariat should re-approach the Arab League Secretariat and explore further areas of political, cultural and economic co-operation.

The religious dimension has also been a source of considerable tension within the Organization, which consists of both Christian and Muslim members. This aspect becomes a potential area of friction when the Organization attempts to solve African problems that have religious overtones. The portrayal of the Nigerian civil war as religious conflict between the Muslim North and the Christian Biafrans did cause a few strains within the Organization but in the end the view prevailed that it was essentially a political problem. The OAU could not, therefore, recognize the State of Biafra; but a few individual members, such as Tanzania, Zambia and Gabon, in the exercise of their sovereign rights, did so. Thus, whereas neither the 1967 Kinshasa Summit nor the 1968 Addis Ababa peace negotiations achieved very much, the final agreement embodied in the September 1968 Algiers Summit clearly indicated the principle of broad agreement based on consensus. Besides appealing for cessation of hostilities, the declaration of an amnesty by the Federal Government and the provision of humanitarian relief supplies, the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government invoked Article (iii), paragraph 3, of the Charter and the resolution on Border Disputes among African States (AHG/Res. 16 (i) 1964).

Within the Black African grouping there is also considerable diversity; Anglophonism and Francophonism are, perhaps, the most obvious factors. The

political, cultural and economic bonds that continue to exist between France and her former colonies have sometimes led the Francophone member states to take positions on African issues which amounted to abdication before neo-colonialism. The behaviour of these states is reminiscent of the 'moderate' politics of the Monrovia-Brazzaville bloc before the formation of the OAU. They do not, for instance, subscribe to the fundamental principle of 'an African solution to an African problem', and openly and unashamedly invite and support European armed intervention in African issues. France in particular has a history of several military interventions in order to save its political surrogates from collapse. During the 1977 Shaba crisis in Zaïre, for instance, the OAU watched while France (with American, Chinese, West German and Belgian support) ferried 1,500 Moroccan troops to help quell an apparently popular uprising. During the second Shaba crisis in May 1978, Western action was even bolder: the USA, Britain, France and Belgium went ahead to emplace a 'Pan-African force' made up of troops from Morocco, Senegal, Central African Republic, Gabon, Ivory Coast and Egypt to police the troubled Zaïrean province and allow French and Belgian troops to withdraw. This is a clear illustration of impotence on the part of the Organization.

Nor can it be said that Anglophone members are completely free from neo-colonial influences. The consistently pro-Western policies of Malawi and Kenya, for example, are common knowledge. After the army revolts in Tanganyika, President Nyerere called for an emergency meeting of the OAU to consider the situation which had resulted in his decision to call on the British Government to provide military assistance.<sup>10</sup> By this act Tanganyika was acknowledging that the OAU's interest in such matters cannot be ignored and there is need to seek its approval on ostensibly sovereign matters which do not affect Africa as a whole.

From time to time there is an Anglophone-Francophone tug of war when it comes to the appointment of personnel to certain organs of the Organization, notably the General Secretariat and the Liberation Committee Executive Secretariat (in the latter case this was particularly noticeable in elections for the two Assistant Executive Secretaries during the forty-first Ordinary Session of the OAU Liberation Committee in Arusha in February 1984). During the nineteenth Summit in Addis Ababa, the ex-Portuguese colonies won their cases to have Portuguese as one of the official languages of the OAU. There is every evidence, however, that the OAU has successfully, so far, nipped in the bud any threat to the Organization's existence arising out of linguistic diversity.

<sup>10</sup> Mezu, *The Philosophy of Pan-Africanism*, 71.

## POVERTY AND NEO-COLONIALISM

A much more serious threat to the continued existence of the OAU is posed by the influence of neo-colonialism and the projection on to the African scene of superpower geo-political rivalries. This factor is operative through the medium of the personality cult as well as the prevailing gross poverty in African countries. Concrete examples are needed in this area. Mention has already been made of Egypt and Morocco, once 'doyens of Pan-Africanism under Nasser and the late King Hassan I, respectively. As members of the small but powerful Casablanca group they were positive forces in the quest for African unity and resistance to imperialism. Today under different leaders they have become Washington's cat's paws for the destabilization of the Organization. Indeed during the circus that became Tripoli I and Tripoli II both countries under the current leadership championed the cause of the filibustering group of nineteen.

The economic fragility of the continent makes it a ready victim of 'wallet', 'cheque-book' or 'petro-dollar' diplomacy. To paint a clearer picture of the economic problems of the OAU it is important to go back a little in history to the 1950s and early 1960s when the continent was by and large under colonial rule. If we compare that period to the 1970s we find that annual economic growth was lower in the 1970s than in the earlier period. The difference, generally speaking, can be explained in terms of the decline in prices of raw materials exported by Africa in relation to the progressive increase in the price of capital and manufactured goods which Africa imports through convertible foreign currency. Moreover, Africa experienced unexpected natural calamities, such as drought, desertification and floods. The effects of these disasters were exacerbated by regional conflicts and internal political instability in many African states. The problems of Chad, Western Sahara and the Horn of Africa, are examples of neo-colonial intervention at work, fomenting political instability which in turn adversely affects production. Equally destructive were the shortsighted policies of African governments resulting from ultra-leftist (as in the case of Mozambique) or ultra-rightist (as in the case of Zaire) misappraisal of the prevailing objective conditions and needs of the country.

By 1980 the economic plight of most African countries had assumed the dimensions of a continental crisis. In April 1980, cognizant of the declining economic performance of the continent, African leaders met in Lagos and adopted the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and, later, the Final Act of Lagos (FAL) which aimed at achieving collective self-reliance by the year 2000 with the creation of the African common market.

A great economic concern of the OAU since then has been the realization of the LPA and the FAL. It is not here intended to go into details of this ambitious plan of the OAU; suffice it to say that this historic document is one of the most important that the OAU has ever produced. It is an ambitious plan which is

feasible, given the necessary political will. The LPA and FAL will be realized only if African leaders take their commitments seriously. The present irresponsible attitude of African leaders with respect to payment of their contributions to the OAU does not augur well for the dream of the year 2000. It is, even more seriously, a real threat to the very existence of the Organization — or, at least, its General Secretariat — as arrears in contributions now stand at a staggering US\$40 million.

One area by which Africa has attempted to advance economic Pan-Africanism within the framework of the OAU is that of regional economic organization. Political independence brought the joy of self-rule but it also brought the brutal reality of development administration. The nationalist leaders of ancient kingdoms and diverse ethnic groups found themselves establishing a modern infrastructure with scarce human resources and unexploited natural wealth. Low levels of economic, industrial and structural development as well as the inherited colonial economic structures meant to serve the European metropolises made undiversified economies remain externally oriented. Recently, an attempt has been made to correct this through collective bargaining in the ACP-EEC fashion or through low-level regional arrangements such as SADCC, Ecowas, the Organization of Central African States and the PTA.

### THE OAU AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

As the embodiment of African sensitivities and as an institution for their collective pursuit, the impact of the OAU has been felt primarily in forging a broad consensus over issues of major interest to the member states. This has been particularly so with respect to the OAU's support for the liberation struggle and its fight against apartheid. Given the OAU's security environment, it cannot be otherwise. The need to reconcile national interests with those of the whole can be realized only through consensus. In the end, what is in general seen as the 'African position' is in reality the dominant view — the view of the majority of the members as carried in the resolutions. The existence of a dissenting minority, or the few who reserve their positions, does not usually alter the general position. It is worth noting that the OAU does not vote save in the election of officials. Decisions are arrived at by what in the opinion of the chair is the consensus.

From this stems the OAU style in conflict management. In acknowledgement of pervading sensitivities, Pan-Africanism is invoked to settle disputes. Through a common stance, some incipient disputes such as the Morocco-Algeria dispute have been discouraged. During the nineteenth Summit in Addis Ababa, Somalia's attempt to put up a case of its being the victim of an Ethiopian invasion was silenced by overwhelming opposition. Attempted secessions like those in Nigeria and Sudan have failed to win African support and got blunted in the process. The collective approach has also succeeded in legitimizing nationalist

liberation movements fighting against colonial and minority regimes, thereby providing the national liberation movements with a diplomatic umbrella and material aid, and has induced the OAU to withdraw action on issues perceived as contrary to the African spirit. Thus, for example, member states of the OAU overwhelmingly rejected the idea of dialogue with South Africa, as suggested by the Ivory Coast in 1971, and they refuse to recognize any of the so called 'independent homelands' in South Africa; and during the 1977-8 Ogaden War declined to condemn the Soviet-Cuban intervention on the side of Ethiopia because the Somali goal would have amounted to a forceful rather than peaceful alteration of the boundary. The Supreme Council of Sport in Africa has also achieved tremendous success by dint of this collective approach in its fight against apartheid in sport.

Against this background, it can be said that the OAU has, over time, succeeded to some extent in institutionalizing a pattern of behaviour for African states in conflicts, based on the broad principles of the Charter, especially in such issues as border disputes, secessions, minority regimes and foreign intervention. The importance of this factor is that it has given some kind of credibility to the concept of consensus, as parties who have sought to change the established norms inevitably have found themselves faced with the displeasure of the overwhelming majority of African states. But while there is this positive side, it is also a fact that, at times when it suited their purpose, member states have ignored or violated the resolutions of the OAU and the provisions of its Charter, or have abandoned OAU principles altogether. Somalia has been the greatest culprit over its border dispute with Ethiopia and in its pursuit of the grandeur of a 'Greater Somalia' has embarked on irredentist territorial claims against Kenya and other neighbouring states. Malawi, Botswana, Cape Verde, Comoro, Djibouti, Lesotho and Swaziland have also never paid their contributions to the Organization's Special Fund. During 1983 Mozambique engaged in 'dialogue' with the racist Pretoria regime, but its Foreign Minister took the trouble to explain the circumstances surrounding such talks to the OAU Council of Ministers during the nineteenth Summit in Addis Ababa. Later, after the signing of the Nkomati Accord, President Samora Machel won the sympathy and understanding of his colleagues during the Front-line States' summit in Arusha in April 1984.

However, it is true that some states have not been so courteous. Mediation attempts have often run out of steam, peaceful structures established by the OAU (such as the Commission of Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration) have remained dormant and the Organization has often been presented with a *fait accompli*. Specific examples can be cited here.

**The OAU and Chad.** The OAU involvement in Chad is illustrative of the effects of Africa's economic poverty of ideology, as well as the workings of neo-

colonialism. Though the conflict in Chad started in 1968, active participation by the OAU did not begin until ten years later. By then positions had hardened and the geo-strategic interest of big powers in the area dominated the conflict. Institutional structures in the country had been virtually destroyed and the warring factions had splintered through a combination of personal acrimony and competitive sponsorship by foreign interests and big powers. Peace conferences have been held in various African capitals including the January 1984 Addis Ababa Peace Conference which proved abortive owing to the arrogant intransigence of one of the two parties involved in the conflict. By the middle of 1983 the Chad conflict had ceased to be the product of internal contradictions. Chad is now a geographical expression and a tool of French and US geo-strategic interest in their bid to reduce Libyan influence in the area. Efforts such as the peace-keeping mission set up as one of Africa's endeavours soon collapsed or even failed to take off because of the failure of OAU member states to meet their financial commitments. Disagreements largely of a personality nature between the adversaries and some of the sponsoring African states have rendered mediation efforts fruitless. The Pan-Africanist appeal has been to no avail and the institutionalized principles of broad consensus mentioned earlier have been a dismal failure in Chad. The OAU has no mechanism for enforcing sanctions and can only appeal to the fine sentiments of Pan-Africanism and the lofty principles enshrined in the OAU Charter.

**The Western Sahara Conflict.** The OAU set up at the July 1978 Khartoum Summit a six-nation *ad hoc* committee to address the issue but by then the Polisario Front had already formed a state called the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976, which had been recognized by at least seven African states. This figure rose to twenty-six during the Freetown Summit of 1980. As a result, a pattern of diplomatic encampment and political polarization had started to crystallize within the OAU. Once the OAU became polarized over the conflict the issue became two-pronged: it was necessary both to find a solution to the conflict and to contain the latest disruptive bloc politics within the Organization.

But like all other intractable disputes the active co-operation of the parties to the dispute (that is, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and the Polisario) was missing. Despite several efforts by the Organization, including what appeared to be a breakthrough during the nineteenth Summit, the problem of the Western Sahara is still with us. In many ways it is an even thornier issue than Chad since it is a case of uncompleted decolonization, or decolonization that went wrong. For the first time in the history of the OAU member states are dealing with a colonizing power which is also a member state. The issue has largely immobilized the OAU and so, by an ugly irony, the OAU, instead of helping solve the Western Sahara conflict, has been incapacitated by it, since the issue has now become the OAU itself,

namely how to get it back on its feet again. The solution to the conflict, at least before the nineteenth Summit, appeared to have become secondary to the fundamental question of the OAU's ability to survive serious crisis. In one area the OAU member states have always rallied together and presented a more or less united front: the liberation of the remaining pockets of colonialism and the combating of apartheid. They have done this through the instrumentality of the Co-ordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa.

### THE LIBERATION COMMITTEE

During the Addis Ababa Conference of May 1963 held by the African Heads of State and Government to set up the OAU, they clearly spelt out the aims and purposes of the Liberation Committee and the manner in which they thought it could be of use. The pertinent resolutions stated that the Conference

- (a) currently invites all national liberation movements to co-ordinate their efforts by establishing common action fronts whenever necessary so as to strengthen the effectiveness of their struggle and the rational use of the concerted assistance given to them;
- (b) establishes a co-ordinating committee consisting of Ethiopia, Algeria, Uganda, UAR, Tanganyika, Congo-Leopoldville, Guinea, Senegal and Nigeria, with headquarters in Dar es Salaam, responsible for harmonizing assistance from African states and for managing the Special Fund to be set up for that purpose;
- (c) establishes a Special Fund to be contributed to by member states with the deadline (15 July) to supply the necessary practical and financial aid to the various African national liberation movements;
- (d) appoints the day of 25 May 1963 as Africa Liberation Day and will organize popular demonstrations on that day to disseminate the recommendations of the Heads of States Conference and to collect arms, over and above the national contribution, for the Special Fund.

**Overview of Problems.** An understanding of the problems which have faced, and continue to bedevil, the Liberation Committee can only be achieved by a brief analysis of the Committee's membership, structure, functions and activities. This is so because the OAU Liberation Committee has had to tackle problems which are not of its own making; sometimes, however, the problems arise from the membership, structure and functioning of the Committee itself.

Today the Liberation Committee consists of the following twenty-three countries: Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaïre, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In 1966 it was decided that all member states of the OAU were entitled to observer status on the Committee if they wish to attend any of its deliberations. Liberation movements recognized by the OAU can also send two delegates each

to meetings of the Committee at its invitation. However, the Committee can still hold closed sessions at which attendance is limited to member states.

The Committee's work is carried out through two Standing Committees: the Standing Committee on General Policy, Information and Defence and the Standing Committee on Administration and Finance. The membership of these committees is elected exclusively from member states of the Liberation Committee. These Standing Committees meet prior to the plenary. They produce reports on their functions and areas of responsibility. These are synthesized and adopted as the Liberation Committee's Report to the OAU Council of Ministers. Of late there have been proposals, largely emanating from the need to retrench on cost and time, to merge the meetings of the Standing Committees and the Liberation Committee. The preference has been the maintenance of the status quo.

The Liberation Committee from time to time also appoints *ad hoc* committees to pursue specific matters on its behalf and dissolves them as soon as their mandate has been fulfilled. The decisions, programmes and projects of the Liberation Committee are carried out by an Executive Secretariat. The Executive Secretariat consists of an Executive Secretary (who, at the time of writing, is Brig. Hashim Mbita) who is assisted by two Assistant Executive Secretaries, each of whom is responsible for one of the two Standing Committees mentioned above. Since the inception of the Liberation Committee the tradition has been established that the Head of State of the host country, in this case President Nwinyi, submits the name of his nominee to the key post of Executive Secretary of the Liberation Committee for approval by the Liberation Committee and subsequently by the Council of Ministers. In fact, it is specifically provided that 'the President of the United Republic of Tanzania shall appoint the Executive Secretary and inform the OAU of the fact'. Consequently all the Executive Secretaries of the Liberation Committee have been Tanzanian nationals. The Assistant Executive Secretaries, according to the same Regulations, 'shall be appointed for a 4-year term by the Liberation Committee, in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical distribution and on the basis of rotation within and among the regions'.<sup>11</sup> In spite of the clarity of this provision the election of Assistant Executive Secretaries had been a contentious issue. During the 1982-3 sessions elections were shelved. During the forty-first Ordinary Session in 1984 the incumbents were re-elected after long debates which were characterized by incipient acrimony. The issue was amicably settled.

Since its inception the Liberation Committee has by and large laboured under the perpetual incubus of near bankruptcy, making it difficult to carry out some of its projects of aid to liberation movements. The OAU was set up in an atmosphere

<sup>11</sup> OAU Co-ordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa, *Functions and Regulations of the Liberation Committee* (as revised by the 34th Session January 1980).

of general euphoria and great expectations, and the majority of the member states paid their contributions to the Special Fund. For instance, by June 1964, Tanzania's Oscar Kambona, then Chairman of the Liberation Committee, said only two African independent states had not paid their contributions and recommendations were going to be submitted to the Council of Ministers about the failure of these countries. However, in the following year the financial position deteriorated. Thus by October 1985 the OAU was nearly US\$2 million in debt because less than half of the regular budget and working capital had been paid by the Organization's thirty member states. Twenty-four nations failed to pay their contributions either in full or in part. By 1966 the OAU itself had been hit by a serious financial situation. The total amount raised by the OAU was only US\$1,700,000 and was barely enough to keep the Organization in working order.<sup>12</sup>

The situation has not changed for the better over the years. In its report to the OAU Council of Ministers the fortieth Ordinary Session of the Liberation Committee held at Arusha in February 1983 expressed grave concern about ever-growing arrears in contribution to the Special Fund which stood at the huge sum of \$16,248,802 as at 30 November 1982.<sup>13</sup> Realizing that the assessed contributions to the Special Fund remained the life-blood of the Liberation struggle, the Committee urged all OAU member states to take urgent steps to pay all their contributions and arrears to the Special Fund of the Liberation Committee. The Committee further urged member states of the OAU to avail themselves of the provision in the *Functions and Regulations of the Liberation Committee* which allows payment in kind of 50 per cent of assessed contribution to the Special Fund. Like the OAU itself, the Liberation Committee has no sanctions by which to enforce payment of contributions. It can only exhort and persuade. It is gratifying to note that the young revolutionary and socialist Republic of Zimbabwe is not among any of these nations who default on contributions. Itself the product of a bitterly fought liberation war, it has religiously paid its contributions to the Special Fund, some of the time paying well in advance of its assessed contributions.

The reasons behind the inability of member states to live up to their financial obligations are diverse. Some are simply poor, and are even unable to balance their own national budgets without a massive injection of foreign aid. Others, such as Malawi, simply do not have commitment to Africa's total liberation. Yet others prefer not to channel their aid to a liberation struggle through the

<sup>12</sup> E.M. Dube, 'Relations between liberation movements and the OAU', in N.M. Shamyarira (ed.), *Essays on the Liberation of Southern Africa* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania Publishing House, 1971), 30.

<sup>13</sup> Report of the Fortieth Ordinary Session of the Co-ordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa to the Council of Ministers, 11.

continues to haunt the Liberation Committee regarding the island of Réunion. Here too an *ad hoc* committee was set up to contact the French authorities. No progress has been made so far on whether or not liberation movements exist in these islands, and whether they should be supported. Investigative activities of the Secretary General of the OAU have not been conclusive.

**Prospects.** Naturally, an organization with a historic role to play such as the Liberation Committee would be the object of both objective as well as biased criticism. Over the years several charges have been levelled against the Liberation Committee from left, right and centre, and it is a measure of the overall commitment of the OAU to the total decolonization of Africa that the Liberation Committee has survived to this day. One such criticism is that the Committee's perception of 'liberation' is most constricted: that liberation is seen in terms of only throwing out the European colonialists without much thought of what is installed in their place. In other words, it is seen only in terms of winning 'independence' and the phenomenon of neo-colonialism is not part of its perspectives on liberation. This is not surprising because the above is the official OAU position. The OAU does not address itself to neo-colonialism and eschews ideological questions altogether. It is a conglomeration of Marxist, 'African socialist', feudal capitalist and other regimes. Perhaps the fact that it is so, and its perception of 'liberation' is what it is, can be cited as one of the reasons why it has survived and will continue to survive, again a great compromise.

The Liberation Committee has from time to time been accused of being too much under the influence of the Tanzanian Government. The original choice of Dar es Salaam as Headquarters was even opposed by such leaders as Kwame Nkrumah. In 1964 Lusaka was suggested. There is no doubt that as the one who appoints the Executive Secretary the Tanzanian President has an advantage over his fellow Heads of State and Government. The influence of a single country on the liberation process is not hard to see. If Tanzania had not supported ZANU and the PAC and had banned their leaderships from Tanzania, these movements might very well have atrophied or might even have been de-recognized. Criticism has also been advanced of the Liberation Committee's *modus operandi*: that it is too open. Even countries of dubious nationalist and Pan-Africanist credentials like Malawi continue to eavesdrop on sensitive issues of liberation as 'observers'. Liberia under Samuel Doe and Zaïre under Mobutu, with ever-growing Zionist and South African connections, can still attend Liberation Committee meetings. The security implications are not difficult to see.

In spite of the numerous other forms of criticism levelled against the Liberation Committee, it appears that in the last analysis its existence or demise will depend on two factors:

- (a) *The fate of the OAU itself.* Of late, the Organization has been in the doldrums and its very existence put into jeopardy over such issues as

Liberation Committee, but to grant it directly to the liberation movement with which they have a special relation. Remarks by Comrade R. G. Mugabe epitomize the gratitude that a genuine liberation movement felt for this sort of multilateral and bilateral aid:

I am happy to say our position, though not yet satisfactory, has immensely improved. We take this opportunity of expressing our gratitude to the Frontline States and several OAU countries which have, in addition to their political support for our joint stand as the Patriotic Front, extended material aid to us for the intensification of our armed struggle.<sup>14</sup>

He also thanked the Government and people of Mozambique, under the gallant leadership of Frelimo, for the immense support extended in the face of the savage acts of aggression by the settler regime. Special words of gratitude were also extended to the Government and people of Tanzania, under the wise leadership of Chama Cha Mapinduzi 'who have fathered our struggle and continue to nurture it'.<sup>15</sup>

Another serious problem that has continued to plague the Liberation Committee since its formation is that of uniting the liberation movements. One major hurdle in this connection is the absence of a single ideology of unity. Some states, for instance, believe that it is necessary to unite liberation movements in order to build a single, united and effective organization to confront the colonial enemy, but that such unity must be arrived at by the rival movements through the good offices of the Liberation Committee. A second school on unity is that of states which take the line that in any given territory there was a 'genuine' or 'authentic' liberation movement, and that only it should be recognized and supported. The unification activities of the Liberation Committee have also been frustrated by superpower ideological differences being brought to bear on the African scene. In Angola, for instance, it was said that the FNLA was 'pro-American', the MPLA 'pro-soviet' and UNITA 'pro-Chinese'. In South Africa it is commonly held that the ANC is 'pro-Soviet' while the PAC is 'pro-Chinese'. It can be again said that this particular dimension has made the Committee's position rather invidious and particularly difficult.

Of late the Liberation Committee has had to grapple with the problems of some of Africa's islands which are still under foreign rule. *Ad hoc* committees were formed to gather all relevant information in the islands. Some member states, echoing the contentions of the colonial powers, argue that the people of the Canary Islands do not desire independence, and they question the credentials of a movement such as MPAIAC led by Dr Cubillo. A state of stalemate persists and

<sup>14</sup> R.G. Mugabe, 'The Year of the People's Storm: New Year's message, 1979', in R.G. Mugabe, *Our War of Liberation* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1983), 24.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

the SADR and Chad. If the OAU collapses over any of these issues or over any other issue, it is not easy for one to see how the Liberation Committee, itself an organ of the OAU, can continue to exist. The life of the baby organization is inextricably linked to that of the mother body.

- (b) *The liberation process in Southern Africa.* At the moment the OAU remains united in its resolve to see the achievement of independence by Namibia and the eradication of apartheid in South Africa. After this has been achieved strains may begin to appear within the OAU as well as the Liberation Committee (if the latter body will not have been dissolved upon completion of its mandate.) There are some who hold that the South African problem is qualitatively different from the traditional one of decolonization: that in South Africa the problem is that of forcing the rulers to abandon apartheid, and that there is no need for an armed liberation struggle against a foe whose might would wreak havoc on the fledgling nations on the frontline. It is, however, significant to note that the Liberation Committee has already tilted towards the stance that there is the need for a liberation struggle in South Africa: both the ANC and the PAC are regarded as *bona fide* liberation movements and receive substantial aid for their armed struggle from the Liberation Committee. But the fate of the Liberation Committee is also contingent upon the economic well-being of Africa. The current world economic recession has wrought havoc on already fragile African economies, making it increasingly difficult for member states of the OAU to contribute both to the OAU General Fund as well as to the Special Fund. If this situation worsens, it would gnaw at the very sinews of the Organization and severely cripple it or render it moribund altogether. Its efficacy would be put to naught and its demise be a matter of time.

## CONCLUSION

It has become fashionable of late to say that the greatest achievement of the OAU is that it has survived at all. But this can hardly be said of the Liberation Committee: it is the cutting edge of the liberation process in Africa and unless it continues to be of practical value to the process it loses its *raison d'être*. Those who participated in the anti-colonial armed struggle in Portugal's African empire and in the bitter liberation war against the Rhodesian White settler minority regime are aware of the invaluable moral, political, diplomatic and material support extended by the OAU through the Liberation Committee. There is still cause among African patriots for faith in the OAU and the Liberation Committee. Its ideals are still beyond reproach though its means or resources can only give cold comfort to those who are keen to see a stepping up of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. The signing of the Nkomati Accord by South Africa and Mozambique and the enormous pressure already being exerted on South Africa's neighbours to enter similar accords open up a new vista of imponderables to which the OAU will have to address itself concretely.

The preceding analysis of the problem of the OAU has revealed that the dreams of the founding fathers are far from being realized. Far from the OAU becoming an instrument for continental union or one that would lead to a degree of economic and political unity which is essential if Africa is to prosper, it has, by and large, become an object of derision. It is true, as has been pointed out, that there has been limited success in decolonization, solution to some border disputes, thwarting secessionist forces and in regional co-operation. But the grand quest for political and economic unity remains far from being realized. No resolutions of the Organization are practically enforceable on member states. The OAU has no power and cannot impose sanctions of any sort. Its ability to solve problems depends largely on the willingness of member states to co-operate. Thus once a member state decides to ignore OAU resolutions or the principles of the OAU Charter (which all have pledged to observe) there is no action it can take other than to re-affirm its general position.

There is a growing mood among serious-minded member states, tired of crippling stalemates, filibusters and outright defiance of resolutions, that the OAU Charter is in dire need of thorough re-examination and overhaul to make the Organization more effective in enforcing agreed positions. Giving the OAU 'teeth' will transform the Organization from being a forum of lofty principles and an endless talking-shop into a positive instrument for the realization of Pan-Africanist ideals.