

American Federalism As A Storehouse Experience For A Federated Africa

Didier KOMBIENI,

Assistant Lecturer, English Department /University of Parakou (BENIN) 03 BP: 317 Parakou

Abstract:- The main challenge confronting Africa today is poverty and the best approach to the continent's worse position is the economic dependence on western countries, which implies their political dependence as well. But even if, the essence of such a situation mounts to history, one should also agree that Africa's background history, marked with slavery and colonization, is not unique. The study on imperialism reveals that the United States of America, the most outstanding international power in almost every domain, was once a colony for an even longer period of time than it has been the case for Africa. A comparison, though informal, of the historical processes of both Africa and America would however reveal a kind of parallel: both got their independence from European powers; both had their entities immediately joined into a union (Confederation for America, Organization of African Unity for Africa); both unions proved inefficient, which led to changes: Federalism for America and African Union for Africans. But if for the former, the change has proved positive, it is the opposite for the latter. Based on that assumption, it is not understandable that the Organization of African Unity survived so long (about forty years) before African leaders found it unproductive; still the successor of the OAU has come dead-born: no change, no perspective for changes. A true federation of States is needed today before any real independence and prosperity of African countries can be effective; but with the present state of things, federating African States would not be possible unless it goes through effective regional integrations.

Key-words: *African dependence – American Federal model – comparison of historical processes - OAU – African Union - federation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Africa, from independence to now, is characterized by a series of economic and political crisis here and there on the continent. The continent has also shown a weak productivity and creativity capacity in domains such as science and techniques, even if one has to admit the existence of important but few achievements by some African on the continent: there are famous painters, sculptors, writers, scientists.... But here are the terms in which countries are appreciated in modern world: justice; liberty; social and economic progress, democracy. This apprehension, as one might expect it, always sets Africa as a whole on a bad position on international scale, economically and politically. And this implies and explains the continent's being permanently dependent on western countries, even when it's about sensible matters as food sufficiency and elections. An author from Lebanon says: Africans are borrowing from the fruits of the present of others, without realizing that this present of these others is the result of a long working past and the bait of a future. In an artificial scenery which is not the continuation of themselves, they are living on the efforts of others, leaving their intelligence lie fallow [1]

The starting point of African current situation is the gift independence, with neither the people, nor their early leaders in general being truly ready to manage it. Even though African's colonies fights for independence was explained by their leaders as a strong will to take the continent and its people to development, it has become observable that such an objective is far from being achieved half a century and more after. For many (Africans in particular), this bad position of the continent is to be attributed to the former colonizer who actually is still on control; but a true analysis, going along with former critics such as Cameroonian writer Axelle Kabu, reveals a different apprehension: the contemporary African situation is a clear and true account of a "refusal of development" [2]. How can it be conceived that Africa, a privileged provider of western countries in raw materials of every kind, keeps on regressing? How can it be accepted that African states have more diplomatic relations with western countries than they have with neighbors of the continent. It may be accepted that slavery and colonization have played a role in the continent's current state and position; but are these typical to Africans? How could it be explained that the USA, a former British set of colonies have better and successfully led their post-independence life while Africans, who as a whole got theirs almost a century after, have failed to do so.

II. AFRICAN STATES: FROM INDEPENDENCE TO ATTEMPTS OF UNION

1-1- The false African independence

Even though some African leaders credited with obtaining independence for their people, it's likewise clear that the colonizers did not accord time for the African peoples and early leaders to gain maturity experience about effective management of their own affairs. The USA's case could serve as an appropriate example for that. In 1757, when troubles had already started with the mother country, the Albany colony had proposed that all the thirteen colonies should join into a union so as to prove more powerful before the British imperial power. But the idea was simply rejected by the leaders of the colonies, who then refused the idea of surrendering parcel of their power to the building of a union. But with the experience of solidarity, collaboration and common fight during the war, where the thirteen colonies have had opportunity to learn that only union could lead them to success, the union of all the newly independent states became necessary for an effective independence. And when, ten years later (1786), they saw that their people as well as their independence was at risk due to the state of their union (Confederation), they wisely turned into a more effective union (the USA), which has made, and is still making of them, a strong nation, an economic and political power worldwide.

Probably, the African colonizer, who somehow the American colonizer too, had learned from the American independence case, and as such, decided to anticipate, offering Africans what they had just started claiming. African early leaders then, did not have time to meet and exchange so much about a common view and objective for their peoples. Had Africans fought and snatched their independence, the continent would probably have had a different fate. But the colonizers proved cleverer. Their aim was not only to keep a close relation with those new African states, but mainly to maintain control and domination. An account of this assertion is the SékouTouréGuinea; when Equatorial Guinean leader SékouTouré claimed a radical independence, President De Gaulle managed not only to have him isolated on the African and international level, but also to oppose him his people. As a consequence, the man was forced to become a dictator in order to hold power. Today, as a whole, African States are just said to be independent. In actual fact most of them are still under domination; their debts vis-à-vis western powers are growing yearly, and if the creditor seems not strict enough about fast recovery of his funds, it is basically because the more the credit increases, the more the creditor has influence over his debtors.

From all this analysis, it can be appropriate to wonder whether African were really ready for any independence, or to put it in another terms, if Africans got any true independence. Anyway, today it appears too late to waste time on what should have been done before independence; it is not possible to take history into reverse so as to remedy all this. Africans can't simply claim now any radical independence nor declare war on the former colonizers either. Yet, at least, and basing on federal experiences such as that of the USA, and with reference to the present African situation, something can be done to catch up. Africans' preoccupation today should be to focus on the present situation of the continent at large, "and the future possible perspectives, while learning from the past though"[2].

1-2- From the OAU to the AU

When only three years after independence (although this delay was already too long to make such an important decision, with reference to the American experience), African States joined to form the Organization of African Unity, many learnt people would interpret that as a strong consciousness. Unfortunately, OAU can dead-borne: the will of shaping a strong continental instrument for Africa's development and prosperity was immediately counterweighed by the leadership of power carried by those same early leaders, and that is what explains the hesitation or rejection from the large majority of them at the 1963 Addis Ababa continental meeting. In the final document creating the OAU, one can read the following as clearly set objectives:

- To reinforce Unity and solidarity among African States
- To coordinate and intensify their cooperation and their efforts to offer better living conditions to African peoples
- To defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity and their independence
- To get rid of all kinds of colonialism from Africa
- To favor international cooperation according to the United Nations Organization charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [3]

Reading through those above lines clearly reveals that African early leaders didn't really want any kind of effective union; they were rather deciding for a simple solidarity among the new states, and defending sovereignty and territorial integrity was concerned with African countries among themselves. Proofs of such interpretation is the many border problems some African countries are facing one with the other (with a reference to the Benin – Niger case; the Benin – Burkina case, to mention just a few). As such, it won't be of any contradiction to say that the Organization of the African Unity was borne to oppose African Unity. This

assertion goes along with Jean Mfoulou's point of view when he says that, "what immediately comes to the mind when reading the OAU's charter is the lack of a true desire of a Unity of the States, the refusal of a true unity in the one hand, and the care of maintaining stability and the statu-quo in the different states of the organization, in the other hand"[4]But the opposition to an effective unity was not to be read through the charter only; the debate at the convention was a sufficient revelation. Let's mention here the clearly stated position of some of the African leaders at that time, drawn from Axelle Kabu's *Et Si l'Afrique Refusait le Développement?*: For Sékou Touré, for instance, "the African Unity can't be achieved around a single man...";[2] which simply implies that, having a federated Africa, with an executive body as in the case of the USA, was not acceptable. For sure, such a federal instrument would reduce the states leaders' power, unless they were the one presiding over the executive. Denis Sassou N'guesso found that people like Nkrumah and Obote, who were arguing in favor of a true unity, were showing an "unjustified impatience". "Elsewhere, he said, time is measured in term of centuries; in Africa however, one would like everything to be achieved immediately" [2]

- Houphouët-Boigny, who already considered that his country was the most economically prosperous in West Africa so that it could do without its neighbors, said that "we should not ignore the current existence of the nationalism, sometimes in an exacerbate form, which some individual African states have been forced to adopt, due to their fights against colonialism" [2]. Did Africans fought any colonialism more than Americans? For sure, no. Yet, it was that same experience in fighting against colonialism which urged American to form that strong federation as they still have today. Hubert Maga qualified the idea of a true African Unity as "ambitious, but a chimeric project"[2], which simply means, it was more a dream than a possible.

As such, except for Nkruma and Obote who defended the idea unsuccessfully, all other African leader at the Addis Ababa convention in 1963 saw a true African unity as impossible; yet they all agreed to name the resulting instrument: Organization of African Unity, which sounds as if the mission devoted to this institution should be: to organize and achieve unity. In the early beginning of the twenty-first century, when Muhammad Al Kadhafi was championing the idea of changing the OAU into African Union, even though not many Africans dreamed of huge positive changes, it was expected that something could be improved.. It is still memorable that, when Americans, after ten unsuccessful experiments with the *Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union*, were about to revise their confederal instrument, wise man Alexander Hamilton warned: "it would be as putting new clothes on an old garment"[5]. In the African case, the fact of moving from OAU (unity) to AU (union) is rather worse than putting new clothes on an old garment; it is a regress, as things have rather gone worse since then. Today, under the African Union, the African continent has had more challenges than ever with reference to the spread of constitutional putsches by more or less democratically elected presidents, who now wants to be presidents for life. There is the Touareg case in the North of Mali, the Boko-Haram, acting in the North of Nigeria, in Tchad and Cameroon, killing and kidnapping people with almost no resistance; there recently was the Ebola disease that killed so many people on the continent and in the central African region in particular. There also is the conflict about country borders, as has been the case with Benin and its neighbors of Niger, Burkina and even Togo and Nigeria. In such cases, the African countries are always obliged to refer to the former colonizers for solutions, which sounds a paradox. If, astonishingly, a single country like Nigeria can, from a personal initiative restore a destitute President in Gambia byputschists, the whole African Union, despite all efforts, could not do likewise in Central Africa when Bozize drove Patasse from power. If France did not unilaterally act in Cote d'Ivoire the civil war in the country with Gbagbo and Ouattara as main protagonists would probably still be on the way; if the western countries did not intervene in the North of Mali, nobody can guess what would have already become of the whole country today; if the same western countries did not act against Ebola in Central Africa and the Lassa in Benin, the whole African continent would probably be in progressive but hast depletion. Worse, the main actor of the birth of the African Union, to name Mouhamar Kadhafi, was attacked and assassinated before the eyes of his peers, all of them members of the African Union, by the international community, and France as the champion. In America, the federal government created by the constitution has had the mission to protect the states against invasion from outside and from strife and violence at home. It is true, the American states governments have generally been strong enough to maintain order within their own borders. But behind them stands the awesome power of the federal government, which is constitutionally empowered to make the necessary steps to preserve peace. Such strong federal organization is what Africa needs to stop internal disorder while hindering western manipulation, domination and exploitation, and this is still possible.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR A TRUE AFRICA'S LIBERATION AND PROSPERITY

1-3- The need for federative regional and continental institutions

Today, despite the social and economic emerging of a few African countries with reference to South-Africa, Equatorial Guinea and Tunisia, it's clear that as a whole, the states cannot individually overcome the scourges of poverty that that is their current principal characteristic. The same way, the assistance received from the western

countries is far from being an innocent one. As such, the best approach to Africa's prosperity is necessarily a true integration of African's states, and beyond cooperation through mere structural regional and continental institutions like the Economic Community of West-African's States (ECOWAS), the Common Market for East and South Africa (COMESA), the South Africa Development Community (SADC), the Arab-Maghreb Union (AMU) or the African Union (AU), unification of the whole continent appears as a solution.

Yet, the long post independent experience with self-management of their countries has done much to drive African states from any common objectives such as integration and true independence from the western powers. This situation has given individual leaders a strong envy for power, with reference not only to the repetitive putsches on the continent, but also to the increasing numbers of candidates for general elections in the different states. As a matter of fact, having all fifty-four countries joined in a federative community in one step would be quasi impossible. Americans succeeded their federation in 1787 because of the short number of the states then (only thirteen), and yet with that number things haven't been so easy: Rhode Island didn't go to the 1787 Philadelphia Convention, and when the out coming Constitution was submitted for ratification, it took two years for the required three-quarter ratification to be obtained. It then appears that the more you are, the more difficult it will be for you to come to an agreement. Regional grouping are necessary first for African countries to reach a final full federation, and the existing regional communities could well be referred to and transformed. For instance, one may set up four regional federative republics, as follows: the Federative Republic of North Africa (FRNA), the Federative Republic of South Africa (FRSA), the Federative Republic of West Africa (FRWA) and the Federative Republic of East Africa (FREA). The materialization of those federal republics would be seen through the suppression of the pretended natural boundaries and any other barriers set among the countries and against the peoples. A second measure would be instituting a single currency in each Federative Republic. The Republics would be ruled by a Federal Legislative Body composed of members from all the concerned original countries; and a five year mandate should be sufficient for all the federal executive, legislative and judiciary institutions to be established, but mainly for the now political parties to join in larger federal political parties. Once those Federative Republics have become effective, they would all meet to decide for shaping the Federal Republic of Africa, going through the same process as the Regional Federations, yet within a long period which could go from twenty-five to fifty years.

1-4- The linguistic issue in the process of federation

Even with the now various official languages and the numerous local ones, linguistic integration would not pose any problem for both the first step Regional Federations and the final Continental Federation. Cameroon has been bilingual with English and French and this never been a handicap for the nation national integration. Moreover, most now African countries have either French or English for official languages, and those Maghrebi countries that speak Arabic, or Equatorial Guinea with its Spanish, are also learning French or English. Likewise, America as a melting pot, was created by settlements from almost all Europe, then people speaking different languages (English, French, German, Spanish,...), yet the country is well integrated, and without any imposition, English has become the main and official language. Let then the language not be any handicap in the process of Regional and Continental Integrations.

IV. CONCLUSION

Despite the overt claim for a true union from successive African leaders since independence, from Nkrumah to Kadhafi and onwards, none of the continent's leaders has shown eagerness towards relinquishing parcel of their power and sovereignty in favor of such a union. The present study has intended to show that the United States of America, though not a perfect model, could be a good reference for Africans for a true union which is necessary before any prosperity. This study is then based on a quantitative, descriptive and comparative approach; it is a literary work based on the survey of the available factual data. But more specifically, this is a comparison of the United States of America and Africa through their colonial and federal experiences, and a proposal of steps to reach the final continental integration and federation. Through this study, I have come to the conclusion that Africa and America have had a more or less similar colonial and post-colonial experience, with some specificity though. The USA being senior in this experience, it can be said that Africans should consider the American federal experience as a reference.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dumont, René (1974), *L'Afrique Noire est mal partie*, Ed. Seuil, Paris
- [2] Kabu, Axelle (1991), *Et si l'Afrique Refusait le Développement*, Ed l'Harmattan, Paris
- [3] 3-Ki-Zerbo J, (1986), *Histoire de l'Afrique Noire, d'Hier à Demain*, Paris, Hatier
- [4] M'foulou, Jean (1986), *L'OUA : Triomphe de l'unité ou des mentalités ?*, Ed l'Harmattan, Paris

- [5] Bowen, Catherine D (1966), *Miracle at Philadelphia : the story of the Constitutional Convention, May to September 1787*, New York, Little, Brown and

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Asso, Bernard (1976), *Les Chefs d'Etat Africains : l'Expression des Etats africains de Succession Francaise* ; Paris, Ed. Albatros
- [2] Bowen, Catherine D (1966), *Miracle at Philadelphia : the story of the Constitutional Convention, May to September 1787*, New York, Little, Brown and Co
- [3] Dumont, René (1974), *L'Utopie ou la Mort*, Paris, Ed. Seuil
- [4] Dumont, René, (1979), *L'Afrique Noire est Mal Partie*, Paris, Ed. Seuil
- [5] Elmar, Daniel J, (1984), *American Federalism : A view from the states*, 3rd Ed. New York, Harper and Row
- [6] Kabu, Axel, (1991), *Et Si l'Afrique Refusait le Développement?*, Paris, Ed. l'Harmattan
- [7] Ki-Zerbo J, (1986), *Histoire de l'Afrique Noire, d'Hier à Demain*, Paris, Hatier
- [8] M'foulou Jean (1986), *L'OUA : Triomphe de l'unité ou des mentalités ?*, Paris, Ed l'Harmattan,
- [9] Patterson, S, C,(1989), *A more Perfect Union : Introduction to American Government*, 4th Ed., Washington DC, Brooks and Cole
- [10] Tamsir N. D, (1971), *Histoire de l'Afrique Occidentale*, Paris, Canal Présence Africaine