



# TOWARDS AFRICAN INTEGRATION: RETHINKING PAN-AFRICANISM THROUGH KWAME NKRUMAH'S *REVOLUTIONARY PATH*

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## Abstract:

This paper examines the contemporary relevance of Kwame Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist vision through a critical look at his seminal work known as *Revolutionary Path* (1973). As African continent continues to face challenges such as economic dependency, political fragmentation, insecurity, military interventions etc... Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist vision of continental unity offers essential insights in a process of real African integration. The study analyzes three key dimensions from *Revolutionary Path*: the necessity of political unity as foundation to economic independence, the critique of neocolonial strategies of creating disunity in Africa, and the need for revolutionary act to achieve true sovereignty and unity. Through textual analysis of Nkrumah's arguments as well as through the current framework of the African Union, the research reveals the existence of tensions between Nkrumah's radical approach to African unity, and the majority incrementalists models which dominate the current discourse of African integration. The paper shows that Nkrumah's *Revolutionary Path* anticipates obstacles that hinder the progress of African organizations namely the African union (AU), African Continental Free Trade (AFCFT), and regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In the process of analyzing the paper, post-colonial theory is tentatively used to explain themes of political and economic unity, neocolonialism, and revolution. The findings contribute to the current discourse of African integration by offering some crucial insights in overcoming obstacles that hinder its achievement.

**Keywords:** *African Integration, Pan-Africanism, Kwame Nkrumah, African Union.*

## 1. Introduction

The quest for African integration remains an important topic in postcolonial African political and economic debate. But this is not new because since then "Africa has tried to unite well before independence... [and] many organizations have been created in an attempt to unite the continent" (Seka 157). Despite numerous frameworks of those organizations like the OAU (the Organization of African Anion), now the AU

(African Union), AFCFTA (African Continental Free Trade), and regional blocks like the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), SADC (Southern African Development Community) etc, the continent continues to undergo the same issues, which include fragmentation among the leaders, economic dependency, and external interference. Recent studies reveal that there exist several obstacles that stand against African integration, including “lack of a sustained commitment on the part of the African leaders, the immaturity of individual African countries” (Seka 157), “significant economic disparity between and within countries” (Adeluat et al, 7).

Responding to the above-mentioned obstacles and their likes, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president and one of the leading advocates of Pan-Africanism, articulated a revolutionary vision in many of his works, one of which is *Revolutionary Path*. In this book, Nkrumah strongly articulates the idea of a true unification of African continent as well as the major challenges that retard the African integration which correspond to the realities of the current discourse of the African integration.

On the other hand, Pan-Africanism, which is the basis of Nkrumah's arguments, has been “an ideology and movement that encourages the solidarity of Africans worldwide. It is based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social and political progress and aims to ‘unify and uplift’ people of African descent” (AU echo qtd in Kumah-Abiwu and James 124). In the words of Leon Burrell, Pan-Africanism “has brought Africans and the people of African descent into one aim; ‘the political, economic, and social solidarity for all Africans’” (360). Indeed, Nkrumah’s arguments in his *Revolutionary Path*, as said earlier, not only are Pan-African in nature, but also align with the current discourse of African integration.

The current paper critically questions Pan-Africanism, engaging Nkrumah’s *Revolutionary Path* to assess the relevance of his pan-Africanist vision in the current efforts to African integration. It also argues that Nkrumah’s radical approach of immediate political unity, economic independence, and revolutionary actions remains the best alternative to the gradualist approach. Considering Nkrumah’s thoughts and adapting them to the realities of the current frameworks towards African integration, this research further reveals the different obstacles that prevent the achievement of the current African integration.

The paper is structured into three major parts. The first part discusses the major obstacles that hinder the achievement of African integration, while the second part focuses on the vision of Nkrumah of African integration, discussed in his *Revolutionary Path*. As for the third part, which is followed by the conclusion, it deals with the current framework of African integration through the African Union and the ECOWAS, as a case study, and the actions that should be taken in order to achieve the true integration in Africa.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Even though many theories are available to discuss the themes of Pan-Africanism and/or African integration, their relevance always depends on the purpose to achieve in the discussion. As a result, the current study, based on its goals, finds post-colonial theory quite relevant in discussing Pan-Africanism and African integration. According to Dinurriyah, Post-colonial theory is:

an academic discipline featuring methods of intellectual discourse that analyze, explain, and respond to the cultural legacies of colonialism and of imperialism, to the human consequences of controlling a country and establishing settlers for the economic exploitation of the native people and their land. (93)

Bertens Hans further says that “post-colonialism radically questions the aggressively expansionist imperialism of the colonizing powers and in particular the system of values that supported imperialism and that it sees as still dominant within the western world” (174).

Based on the above, one can argue that post-colonial theory aims at discussing issues facing any country that experienced colonialism. Habib rightly confirms the stand:

post-colonial criticism has embraced a number of aims most fundamentally, to re-examine the history of colonialism from the

perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation.... (Habib 161 qtd in Young)

This shows that post-colonial theory can indeed contribute to seek answers for the questions that the current research intends to respond, which mainly turn around both Pan-Africanism and African integration.

As for the methodology, the researcher decides to work with qualitative method. In this regard, Kothari clarifies that “Qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior. Research in such a situation is a function of researcher’s insights and impressions” (5).

### 3. Obstacles to African integration

As far as obstacles to African integration are concerned, one may not be surprised being informed there exists many of them. But in this section, only the ones considered as major are tentatively highlighted.

Even though in *Revolutionary Path* Nkrumah raises many obstacles through his arguments, one may argue that Neo-colonialism and Lack of Political Will of African leaders stand as the major challenges that, he believes, prevent the achievement of a true African integration. In other words, after reading Nkrumah's *Revolutionary Path*, one will discover that African integration faces many difficulties related to the Lack of Political Will of African leaders and Neocolonialism. It is in this context while Mkandawire argues “Many African leaders rhetorically support integration but fail to commit politically” (587), Cheru Fantu believes that “African political elites often collaborate with foreign actors to maintain power, even at the expense of continental unity” (1193). These two main obstacles, even if there exist others, play an immense role in the delay of integration among African countries. In fact, a deep description of the two obstacles will lead one to believe that they are not only the major obstacles to African integration, but also the contributory causes of the not-mentioned minor obstacles.

#### 3.1. The Lack of Political Will of African Leaders

“Seek ye first political kingdom, and all else shall be added unto you”. He/she who knows about Kwame Nkrumah may know about the previous famous quote of him, which he used to reiterate on several occasions. For instance, in his *Revolutionary Path*, he asserts that “political freedom will open the way for the attainment of economic and social improvement and advancement” (28). For Nkrumah, no matter which way Africans will take to be integrated, as long as the integration is not political in nature, there will always be no concrete solution to the African problems. This is, therefore, the point where the lack of political will of African leaders can be highlighted.

While all of the African leaders, in general, believe that the solution to African problems lies in their being united or integrated, yet they fail to choose the best way towards achieving it. Nkrumah clarifies this by saying “All were agreed on the principles of African liberation and unification, and the need for close co-ordination and co-operation in economic, social and cultural spheres, but there were crucial differences of opinion when it came to questions of methods and procedures” (*Revolutionary Path* 249). But according to Nkrumah despite that, most of them tend to espouse the idea of economic integration, and deny the political one, which is the prerequisite to the well-being of the former. As he rightly says, “the social and economic development of Africa will come only within the political Kingdom, not the way around” (*Revolutionary Path* 235).

With the above in mind, it is obvious that since its beginning, the discourse of African integration suffers from the issue of the lack of political will of some African leaders. For instance, it is histrionically known that since the 1960s, in their way of looking for integration, African leaders had clashes of view which led them to get into different groups; the well-known of the groups and which interest the current research are the Monrovia and the Casablanca ones. The former, on one hand, led by countries like Cameroon, Liberia, Nigeria, and Togo-land prefers the African integration to be economic in nature while the latter with Nkrumah

as a leader and followed by countries like Guinea, Mali, Libya, Egypt, Morocco and Algeria opts for political African integration (*Africa Must Unite* 147-148).

Nevertheless, according to Nkrumah each of the two groups has a reason for their decision. For instance, Nkrumah states that “The Casablanca powers are convinced that political unity should come first, as the necessary prelude to the creation of the extended field for which integrated plans for development in the economic and social spheres can be worked out” (*Africa Must Unite* 148). He further says that “Their [Casablanca] belief in the importance of putting political aims first is strengthened by experience in their own countries, where political independence had to be achieved before economic reconstruction could be taken in hand” (149). As for Monrovia group, Nkrumah argues that their choice for economic integration over political one is also related to their colonial background. He asserts that “there may be some significance in the fact that Monrovia, which has given its name to the group that attaches priority to economic associations, is the capital of the one country on the African continent which has not had to fight a battle for its political sovereignty” (149).

Thus, based on the above, one may assume that each group is likely to be right as far as African integration is concerned, which is true. Nkrumah himself believes that despite their difference in approach “both aim ultimately at some kind of Unity” (146).

As a result, in order to find a consensus on how to achieve such integration, a conference of all independent African states was organized. The conference was held on May 1963 in Addis Ababa, and ended up with the creation of the OAU, which merely seems to contradict Nkrumah’s hope.

When the African leaders met in Addis Ababa for the conference, Nkrumah says, “It seemed that at last the foundation had been laid for the freedom and political unification of Africa, and that the existing blocs and political groupings were at an end” (*Revolutionary Path* 233). Unfortunately, the same clash continues between African leaders. During the conference Nkrumah informs us that:

There were those who advocated a gradualist approach towards liberation and unification, and wished to concentrate on economic and cultural co-operation, and on regional groupings; and there were those who insisted that there could be no genuine improvement in the well-being of the African people without unified political machinery to plan economic development on a continental scale. (*Revolutionary Path* 250)

In the light of the previous discussion on different blocks, there is no doubt that Monrovia group is the one favoring the gradualist approach while the Casablanca group the radical approach.

Thus, after the final decision on the integration, which leads to the signature of the Charter of the OAU, Nkrumah remarks that “Several signatories of the Charter appeared far more concerned with selfish national interests than with the condition of the African people as a whole...” (*Revolutionary Path* 250). This, therefore, means that Nkrumah’s or Casablanca’s political approach fails to influence the framework of the organization, but the gradualist approach, on the other hand, had an immense impact.

As a result, the OAU tends to adopt economic and cultural integration, and regional groupings as the way towards the ultimate integration of Africa. It then clearly appears that the idea of political integration of Nkrumah is finally delayed, and the reason for other obstacles appears.

To condense the discussion, despite some little achievements it has made, based on its framework towards African integration, the OAU seemed inefficient in solving the main preoccupation of Africa, that is the unification. Marinov Eduard confirms this saying that “in the period between the first years after its creation until the signing of the Abuja Treaty, the OAU became less noticeable and insignificant” (78).

That is why, “in 1999 a special meeting of the OAU was held in Sirte, which adopted declaration for the creation of the African Union (AU) to replace the OAU” (79). It was during that time, another African leader, Muammar Gaddafi, intended to make the dream of Casablanca group come true by trying to make African leaders of the time adopt political approach in the framework of the AU. As Biney argues that

“Gaddafi is one of the leaders who vigorously supported the ideology of Nkrumah... [to the extent that] ... in 1999, at the extraordinary summit meeting, he shocked many African leaders with his plan of a United States of Africa” (148).

But similar to Nkrumah, Gaddafi’s plan was rejected by his fellow African leaders. And this can also be related to the lack of political will of some African leaders. For instance, “the main initiators of this transformation were leaders of the most economically powerful countries on the continent - south Africa and Nigeria - Thabo Mbeki and Olusungo Obasanjo- as well as the leader of the Libya, Muammar Gaddafi” (Marinov 79). It is obvious that leaders of countries like Nigeria and South Africa and their likes were not yet ready to politically integrate.

In the light of the above, one can argue that there must be a reason/reasons behind the lack of political will of African leaders, which is true. In fact, there are some reasons among which there is lust of power of some African leaders and the influence of Neo-colonial powers. This is the reason why, the OAU now AU as well as the remaining regional organizations like the ECOWAS, SADCC, etc. despite their incapability in solving African problems still exist. Nkrumah noticed this since the 1960s, and avers that:

Economic and regional groupings and organizations which have from time to time been formed in Africa have achieved very little in terms of improving the standard of living of the African masses. It is not for nothing that such groupings are not opposed by international monopoly finance and the indigenous bourgeoisie, since these groupings and organizations are tailor-made to serve their interest. (*Revolutionary Path* 14)

Therefore, Neo-colonialism finally appears to be another major obstacle to the African integration.

### 3.2. Neocolonialism

As Nkrumah says, “The GREATEST danger at present facing Africa is Neo-colonialism and its major instrument, balkanization” (*Africa Must Unite* 173). The term balkanization refers to the strategy the Neo-colonial powers use to break up Africa into small and weak nations (173). Moreover, their presence in Africa “perpetuate[s] an imbalance relationship between a former colonizer and her liberated colonies by providing a superstructure with irresistible economic relations and potentials to further exploit and extract the economic resources of the latter...” (Babatalo Jadesola). As result, it is clear that Neo-colonial powers will never support the idea of unity among African states since their mission is to divide in order to keep exploiting.

In this token, it is important to know that Neo-colonialism is currently involved in almost every domain of the Africa affairs whether economic, political, cultural or defense. Biney Ama states that “...Neo-colonialism that Nkrumah perceptually analyzed in great details continues to coexist with the forces of globalization that presently seeks to homogenize the world at the levels of the economic, ideological, political and cultural “(132). For instance, through “economic or monetary means”<sup>1</sup> they succeed in controlling many African countries, causing a delay of integration in Africa.

In this token, Nkrumah in his famous book, *Neo-colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism*, warns Africans about the matter arguing that “the essence of Neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic and thus its political policy is directed from outside” (ix). Nyikal Harold shares the same view with Nkrumah stating that “there is merely a new form of colonialism, by the same western countries, masked under the pretext of economic support for Africa, directly enforced or institutionalized in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO)” (1). In this essence, there is

<sup>1</sup>*Neo-colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism* ix

no way African countries could be integrated since they are being controlled by the enemies of what they intend to achieve.

Clear enough, from the above, one will now understand the reason why organizations like the OAU, AU, ECOWAS, SADCC, are not opposed by the colonial powers despite the purpose of their establishment which is leading Africa towards a continental integration. The fact is that, the Neo-colonial powers already got involved in the basic driving force of today economy<sup>2</sup>, which is the means the so-called organizations claim to use in reinforcing unity in Africa. As a result, Neo-colonial powers are to decide on what those who claim to gradually unite Africa will do. That is why, referring to this situation, Nkrumah once says, “the organization of African Union has been rendered virtually useless as a result of the machinations of the Neo-colonialists and their puppets” (*Revolutionary Path* 422).

Consequently, since the gradual approach, which favors economic approach over political one is dominated by the Neo-colonial powers, there is a need of an alternative, which is likely to be the vision of Nkrumah explained in his various works, one of which is *Revolutionary Path*.

#### 4. Nkrumah’s vision in *Revolutionary Path*

In his *Revolutionary Path*, Nkrumah passionately says that:

I do not think that I have ever attended a single meeting or conference between African States where I have not warned against the dangers of delaying unification... There is not an African States which is secure, or which is free to develop its resources to the full or the benefit of its own people. All are economically weak, and all are politically unstable.  
(14)

The above quote clearly shows the extent to which Nkrumah believes in the importance of the integration of African unity. It further implies his efforts in trying to unite Africa, which is partially discussed in the section dealing with the obstacles to African integration. In the discussion, it appears that Nkrumah, unlike the other African leaders, prefers African integration to be political in nature so that all the remaining steps such as economic and socio-cultural integrations will logically follow.

##### 4.1. Political Unity as a Foundation to economic independence

As partially stated earlier, Nkrumah believes that political approach is the only way that could guide Africans towards an effective integration, which will guarantee the progress of the continent in all spheres. This is what makes Nkrumah’s view of African unity stand different. Gudeta mentions, “the kind of continental union Nkrumah envisaged was one that would, among other things, resolve border conflicts and improve the lives of Africans, bringing about the dignity and unification of the African peoples” (85). For instance, while most of the African leaders tend to forget about the outside influences in their process of integration, Nkrumah, on the other hand, seriously takes that into consideration. He explains in his *Revolutionary Path* that African unity implies:

1. “Imperialism and foreign oppression should be eradicated in all their forms” (465)
2. “Neocolonialism should be recognized and eliminated” (465)
3. “The new African nation, must develop within a continental framework” (466)

<sup>2</sup>In *Revolutionary Path* 17

This shows that Nkrumah understands the extent to which neocolonialism and imperialism endanger the unity of Africans. This is because he is well aware of the way they control Africa since the colonial rule. Rodney Walter rightly says, "... colonial rule meant the effective eradication of African political power throughout the continent..." (*How Europe Underdevelop Africa* 36).

On top of that, to understand Nkrumah's opinion of political unity first option, one should know the context in which Nkrumah and his followers regained their independence in Ghana. During their fight for independence, Nkrumah says, they were unable to rebuild Ghana's economic sphere till the time they regained their political independence. (*Africa Must Unite* 149). It is in this context he advises his fellow African leaders:

...just as we understood that the shaping of our national destinies required of each of us our political independence and bent all our strength to this attainment, so we must recognize that our economic independence resides in our African union and requires the same concentration upon the political achievement. (*Africa Union* 44)

What is more, one thing that is clear is, Nkrumah, in all his struggle, does not underrate the importance of economic integration. All he says is to maintain political integration before economic. In fact, for him, the two are interrelated; one is dependent on another and vice versa. He says, "in my view, therefore, a united African-that is, the political and economic unification of the African continent- should seek three objectives" (*Africa Must Unite* 218):

- ✧ "Firstly, we should have an over-all economic planning on a continental basis" (218)
- ✧ Secondly, we should aim at the establishment of a unified military and defense strategy" (219).
- ✧ "[Thirdly],... it will be necessary for us to adopt a unified foreign and diplomacy to give political direction to join our efforts for the protection of our economic development of our continent" (220).

In this regard, Nkrumah further believes that along with this political vision, Africans need a revolutionary act in order to achieve their goals. This can be inferred from what he says, "I was convinced that before there could be any meaningful economic and social progress, there must be successful political revolution" (*Revolutionary Path* 52). This means that the achievement of African integration, even though it requires political will and eradication of neo-colonialism, needs also revolutionary actions.

## 4.2. The need for Revolutionary Actions

Before changing his mind, Nkrumah, during the struggle for independence, tends to espouse Gandhian approach of non-violence. In the book under study, referring to the purposes of All-African People's Conference held in Accra, Ghana, in December, 1958, Nkrumah says, "the main purpose ... will be to formulate concrete plans and work out the Gandhian tactics and strategy of the African Non-Violent Revolution..." (*Revolutionary Path* 132).

However, after experiencing different challenges including his overthrow, Nkrumah got convinced that "positive action could never liberate Africa from colonialism and Neo-colonialism" (Mansour 29). Commenting on the same subject matter, Oliverira Bruno says, "by 1968, Nkrumah no longer believed in peaceful ways to end imperialism. Armed struggle and violent revolution are, at this moment, part of his vocabulary" (44). Nkrumah himself rationalizes that "...revolutionary warfare is the key to African freedom and is the only way in which the total liberation and unity of the continent can be achieved" (*Revolutionary Path* 461).

Accordingly, since fighting against Neocolonialism, which is a core element to achieving African integration, requires a revolutionary action, it is as well necessary to know the way to putting it into practice. In this case, Nkrumah's opinion is to get Neo-colonialism eradicated from the African soil, though it seems to be a very difficult task. That is why he tentatively suggests the way of doing by stating that "the pre-requisite of a correct and global strategy to defeat Neo-colonialism is the ability to discover the way in which State

becomes a Neo-colonialist” (*Revolutionary Path* 432). In his *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare*, he expands his explanation of a country to be Neo-colonialist, claiming that “a state can be said to be a Neo-colonialist or client state if it is independent de jure and dependent de facto. It is a state where political power lies in the conservative forces of the former colony and where economic power remains under the control of international finance capital” (8). With this explanation in mind, one can tentatively say that most African countries are Neo-colonialist even though some of them start acting revolutionary. Alliance if Sahel States is a good example to be cited.

Therefore, in order to succeed in the revolutionary action, it is important to consider Nkrumah’s suggestions. For instance, recognizing the potential influence of Neo-colonialism on the revolutionary struggle, Nkrumah says, “A number of external factors affect the African situation, and if our liberation struggle is to be placed in correct perspective and we are to KNOW THE ENEMY, the impact of these factors must be fully grasped” (1). This means that for African states to be integrated, they have to understand the strategy the enemy uses to destroy their plans. With reference to one main strategy, Nkrumah further says: “imperialism [as well as Neo-colonialism] usually resorts to all types of propaganda in order to highlight and exploit differences of religion, culture, race, outlook, and of political ideology among the oppressed masses, or between regions which share a long history of mutual commercial and cultural exchange.” (*Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* 9).

The quote obviously shows that imperialism and neo-colonialism aim at creating mistrust among Africans. This led Africans to remain disintegrated.

In this context, to deal with the strategy Nkrumah believes that leaders of the revolution should possess certain qualities that will help them render the enemy weak. He says, “...the machinations of the colonial power will fail wherever the leaders of the struggle for independence maintain a clear spirit of vigilance, and cultivate genuinely revolutionary qualities” (*Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* 11).

In a nutshell, Nkrumah highlights three essential components of neo-colonialism that should be taken into account to eradicate Neo-colonialism before then African integration can be achieved. The three essential components of neo-colonialism are: (15)

1. Economic exploitation
2. Puppet governments and client states
3. Military assistance
4. Economic "aid"

Considering the above components, one can notice that after economic strategy, which is discussed previously, Neo-colonialism uses some Africans in their mission of exploiting African countries and preventing them to get integrated. That is why Nkrumah argues that “the struggle against puppet governments, and against all forms of exploitation, is the basic condition for the survival and development of a genuine liberation movement in Africa”(15).

As far as ‘Military assistance’ is concerned, the solution lies in the unity of African countries. Nkrumah says it in his *Africa Must Unite* when he avers that “if we do not unite and combine our military resources for common defence, the individual States, out of a sense of insecurity, may be drawn into making defence pacts with foreign powers which may endanger the security of us all” (220).

Thus, bearing the above discussed obstacles in mind, it appears imperative to discuss the current frameworks of African integration to see what is to be done in order to get the alternative for the success of this dream of every African.

## 5. Contemporary frameworks

As far contemporary frameworks of African integration are concerned, one cannot discuss them without focusing on both the African Union (AU) formerly known as the Organization of African Union (OAU), and the other regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), (Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) etc.,.

The aim of all the above organizations as well as the remaining ones is to lead Africa towards unity. In other words, the purpose of their creation is to gradually unite African countries into one continent. But despite their efforts in bringing this aim into reality, their frameworks fail to work out, something that necessitates a deep discussion on their frameworks. In this regard, the current section tends to put emphasis on both the African Union, which is the giant in the matter, and one regional block as a case study.

### 5.1. The African Union (AU)

Replacing the Organization of African Union, the AU, according to Okhonmina becomes “the institutional manifestation of the desire for integration in Africa” (86), which implies that the former, as stated earlier, fails or seems incapable to accomplish one its main missions achieving African integration.

Therefore, from its creation, the AU remains the only hope for Africans. In fact, based on its objectives, one can say that the time of the actual African integration is just in the corner. For instance, as mentioned on the article 13 of the consecutive act of the African Union, some of the objectives for its creation are to:<sup>3</sup>

- ✓ achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and the peoples of Africa;
- ✓ defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States;
- ✓ accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent;

On the other hand, some of the objectives clearly show that the organization tends to follow the same footsteps of the former organization, and this, however, gives another impression totally different from that given by the above-mentioned objectives. For instance, in the same article, it says, the objective of the organization is also to (*see footnote 3*):

- ✓ coordinate and harmonize the policies between the existing and future Regional Economic Communities for the gradual attainment of the objectives of the Union;

Regarding the first mentioned objectives, it appears that a great consideration is given on Nkrumah’s perspective of African unity through political means. On the other hand, the other objectives show a similar view adopted by the precedent organization, which is achieving the African integration through gradual approach using regional blocks.

Nevertheless, the African Union still remains the hope for the attainment of integration of African countries at the continental scale. This results from some of the achievements it made in the continent. For instance, on March 21st, 2018, the organization signed the Treaty establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) (Cofelice 32). One of the general objectives of the AFCFTA is to create a single market for goods, services, facilitated by movement of persons in order to deepen the economic integration of

<sup>3</sup> The consecutive act of the African Union (4) available at the African Union site

the African continent and in accordance with the Pan African Vision of "An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa" enshrined in Agenda 2063.<sup>4</sup>

On top of that, prior to the establishment of AFCFTA, back in 2007 at the 9<sup>th</sup> summit of African Union, the AU manages to discuss the proposal of a United States of Africa, which is "a contemporary expression of the age long Pan-Africanist aspirations for African Unity" (Okhonmina 86). Among other actions taken in its framework, there is the Agenda 2063, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Peace and Security Council (PSC) (EL BIKAM et al 4) all of which are intended to strengthen unity and development of African continent. This shows the extent to which the AU has tentatively tried to achieve African integration.

However, despite all the trails since its creation, the AU seems to be incapable of achieving the type of integration Africans are waiting for. This is because its framework has some similarities with that of the OAU. For instance, similar to the one of the OAU, the AU's framework gives much attention to economy rather than politic. In addition, the foreign powers succeed to interfere in its affairs through their so-called aid, either economic or military. It is in this regard, EL BIKAM et al, argue that "The AU is increasingly emerging as the continent's platform with foreign partners, and continues to face problems of dependence, governance and leadership" (1).

Furthermore, another issue that seems to weaken the AU's framework is the fact that it "centered on the major regional groups" (EL BIKAM et al 1). That is why, Nkrumah believes that "regional groupings, especially when based purely on economic co-operation ... retard rather than promote the unification process" (*Revolutionary Path* 14). Before pointing out some necessary actions that the AU should take in order to refine its framework, it is necessary to discuss, at least, one of the regional groups to confirm the necessity of removing regional groups from part of the African integration frameworks.

## 5.2. ECOWAS: A Case Study

The Economic Community of West African States happens to be one the serious regional groupings in the context of promoting African integration. Created on May 28, 1975, the ECOWAS aims at promoting economic integration and cooperation among its 15 member states (OGBONNA 54). From the time of its creation to a certain period, the ECOWAS seems to be a very positive decision taken in the process of African integration. As OGBONNA states:

Over the years, ECOWAS has made notable progress in several areas. It has been instrumental in facilitating the free movement of people, goods, and services across member states, establishing common trade policies, and working towards the eventual realization of a single currency. Additionally, ECOWAS has taken on a significant role in maintaining peace and security in the region, particularly through its peacekeeping interventions in conflict zones, which have earned it international recognition. (55)

Despite these achievements, ECOWAS shows its inefficiency in the main purpose of having the idea of regional grouping themselves, which is to gradually unite the continent. In fact, even in its regional scale, ECOWAS ultimately fails to complete its mission of economic integration. This is because, it faces several challenges which include "political instability, economic disparities among member states, and the slow implementation of integration protocols" (OGBONNA 55).

On top of that, OGBONNA claims that "ECOWAS is also affected by external geopolitical interests, including those of former colonial powers, international organizations, and emerging global powers like China

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<sup>4</sup> Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. FRBR URI: /akn/aa-au/act/agreement/2018/african-continental-free-trade-area/eng@2018-03-21

and Russia” (68). He further says that “The influence of external powers can sometimes exacerbate internal divisions within ECOWAS, as member states may align with different international partners based on their own political and economic interests” (68).

As a result, instead of being a means of uniting the continent, the organization has recently become a source of disintegration between African countries, especially among its member states. For instance, after the exit of Mauritania in 2000, on January 29, 2025, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)\_Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger withdrew from the Community.<sup>5</sup> Actually, this is what Nkrumah is afraid about considering regional groupings as a way towards unity. For him, “regional groupings of any kind are a serious threat to the Unity of Africa. Such groupings have decisive influences which can break the forces of cohesion and unity” (*Revolutionary Path* 273).

In the light of the forgoing discussion, it appears that the creation of regional groupings like the ECOWAS is not the concrete solution to the African problems. It also appears that some necessary decisions are to be taken in order to respond to the so long problems of Africa. In this regard, it is crucial to refer to the suggestion of African leaders like Nkrumah.

Accordingly, referring to the vision of Nkrumah, as previously discussed, and the different obstacles that hinder the achievement of African integration, one can say that the African Union, which is the main framework for African integration, has to make some changes in order to achieve its goal.

First, it is crucial for the AU to disconsider the regional groupings as the way towards African integration because doing so gives a way for foreign powers to penetrate.

Second, since Pan-Africanism “is the political philosophy behind the current framework to achieve political unity in Africa through the instrumentality of the African Union (AU) (Okonminah 86), it is very important for the AU to be more pan-African in taking all of its decisions. This will create the political will among African leaders, something that lacks in most of them.

Lastly, the AU should reinforce the non-violent revolution and/or its opposite against any foreign powers, especially Neo-colonial that tend to exploit any individual African country. This is because only when African states are free from the foreign powers that the AU itself will have more powers to take good decisions.

## 6. Conclusion

The African integration is indeed the means that Africans can use to address the current socio economic and political problems. Though the achievement of African political integration happens to be a long journey, there is a need to take a step towards it. Fortunately, the research helps create awareness to undertake positive actions towards its achievement. The current study reveals that among many causes for the delay of African integration, the lack of political will of African leaders and the Neo-colonial influence stand as major obstacles that prevent any further progress. Furthermore, the paper suggests some essential actions that can help achieve the integration. For instance, it argues that the AU, which is the current framework of African integration must refine its framework in order to accomplish its mission. But the question that remains unanswered is, how will the AU proceed to refine its framework despite its current challenges?

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<sup>5</sup> Colonel Festus B. Aboagye. The Withdrawal of AES from ECOWAS: An opportunity for re-evaluating existing instruments for regional integration? 31 January 2025 (online) accessed on June 24<sup>th</sup> 2025

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