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BOOK REVIEW

Unite or Perish: Africa Fifty years after the Founding of the OAU. Edited by Mammo Muchie, Vusi Gumede, Phindile Lukhele-Olorunju and Hailemikael Teshome Demissie. Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA). 2014. Pp 359.

Reviewed by Daniel Alemu¹

*“O my Africa that I love
O my Ethiopia, homeland, not of my birth and my choice
With high plateau which raises into limpid of its sky
The dignity of free persons and splendour of cross.”*

Prof. Claude Sumner² (1919-2012)

A vision is a mental picture of a desired future that an individual, a country/nation or a continent has. It is often articulated in a few sentences, for example, as a preamble to a document. sometimes the future vision is captured in a short simple and catchy slogan. In general however, a vision is often accompanied by a long-term strategic plan on how to achieve the desired future.

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² Prof. Claude Sumner was one of the founding fathers of Addis Ababa University, with the late Dr. Lucien Matt in 1950. He was also instrumental in convening ‘The Second Pan-African Symposium on African Philosophy-Twenty Years After’ in December 1996, New ECA’s Africa Hall building. Scholars from South Africa came to Addis Ababa for the first time to participate in such kind of international conference after the demise of Apartheid. The introductory poem is taken from Prof. Sumner’s anthology of poems which is compiled in one hardcover box embracing three volumes, namely: *Poesies Ethiopiques*, Tome I, *Kebero*, 1976, Tome II, *Alem*, 1977, Tome III, *Krar*, (Odes d’inspiration éthiopienne) Edité sous le patronage du Ministère de la culture et des sports, Addis Ababa, 1978.

³ See Abdalla Bujra, “Pan-African Political and Economic Visions of Development, From the OAU to the AU, From the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) to the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD)”. Accessed on 15 October, available at: <bujra.com/documents/Pan-African-Political and Economic Visions of Development pdf>

Unite or Perish: Africa Fifty years after the Founding of the OAU introduce a maiden and maverick scholarship in promoting 'Pan-Africanism and Afrocentric Thought' under the aegis of AU. The essays incorporated in this book are well allotted in their respective parts and lay the conceptual, theoretical, philosophical, political and ethical foundations of Pan-Africanism and attempt to unearth (like an anthropologist) the antiquated ethical history of Africa, and Ethiopianism as precursor modern black nationalistic wisdom. Ethiopianism as a primordial DNA for Pan-Africanism and latter was pivotal in initiating the establishment of OAU. Its Black Nationalism themes were generally expressed in three forms: *millenarian*, *migratory* and *emancipatory*. The authors eloquently substantiated the Pan-African line and stream of thought as being an embodiment of Ethiopianism. Pan Africanism, as a concept, has defied concise definition because it assumed different meanings and orientations, and has created different shade of meaning for different people. Thus, its core conceptual values animated the liberation of Africans from within and without, from the shackle of slavery, colonialism, bonds of oppression and discrimination.

To cap it all, thus crossing the politico-ideological Rubicon into the proclamation of the ultimate birth of the African Union (AU) on the debris of its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) could be an analogous to a caterpillar morphing into a butterfly. The initial debate in establishing OAU symbolize the *egg*, *caterpillar* growth represents the establishment of OAU in Addis Ababa on 25 May 1993; the *caterpillar* hanging upside down from a twig and spinning itself a silky cocoon represent the establishment of AU in the City of Durban on 9 July 2002. Hence, AU's final integration journey, guaranteeing its people's wellbeing and ushering the continent's self-reliance whilst maintaining genuine partnership with the outside world which corresponds to the emergence of a shining *chrysalis* to colorful flying *butterfly* is yet to be attained.

It can conveniently be said that AU to have come to age in terms of defining Africa's politico-economic integration, cultural, legal, communal normative ordering, cooperation and development agenda at both regional and continental arenas. All that now remains to be pursued rigorously is the accelerated and effective implementations of this integration agenda. The Constitutive Act serving as the *grundnorm* of the Union edifice, has provided the requisite organs and institutions capable of triggering momentum for the nascent Union to morph like the butterfly and go beyond a mere declaration of intent, and gear towards a broader and more efficient, effective and all-embracing Pan African continental organization, which should adhere to the people-centered development philosophy and willing to test itself via devolved grassroots initiatives, local, national, sub-regional and continental private, public and civil society organizations which ought to be in sync with Pan African philosophy and regular tested by an action and result-oriented work ethics.

It is worthwhile to comment at this juncture about a minor error witnessed on p. 182, regarding Ethiopia's tertiary education year of establishment. In this respect, a turning point in the development of the country's education came on 11th December 1950, when the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) was inaugurated and became operational.⁴ Four years later, on 28th July 1954, the Imperial government granted UCAA its Charter. On 26th August 1954, the UCAA held its first graduation ceremony.⁵ Moreover, on 28th February 1961, the Charter of Haile Selassie I University was published on the *Negarit Gazeta*. The Emperor donated his *Genete Leul* Palace to be used as the main campus of the new University and the convocation making the founding of HSIU was held on 18th December 1961.⁶ The anomaly of year can be rectified accordingly.

The book under review with its catchy slogan 'Unite or Perish', which was intentionally coined from Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's inaugural speech addressing the establishment of the OAU on 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa, has adequately captured the past and present challenges of Africa and alluded some mitigating measures under the Pan African motto as how to heed to the sign post of the AU 21st century *suprastructure* integration modality, embodying 53 nation states. 'Unite or Perish' is immensely interwoven with 'Pan African and Afrocentric Thought' it is a rare species of scholarship debunking the age old Eurocentric discourse on the African Continent and highly recommended to students, academics, policy makers, international lawyers and development practitioners.

⁴ See Taye Assefa (Ed.), *Academic Freedom in Ethiopia-Perspective of Teaching Personnel*, Forum for Social Studies, Addis Ababa, 2008, p. 1.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid. p. 2.