NIGERIA'S ROLE IN THE FORMATION OF AFRICA UNION IN 2002

BY

TESSY ENOMWENGHO AIHEVBA

ART2100494

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY

FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

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A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, EDO STATE IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify this research project was carried out by AIHEVBA TESSY ENOMWENGHO in the Department of International Studies and Diplomacy, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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Prof. O. B. Osadolor	**Prof. J. C. Nwaka**
(Project Supervisor)	**(Head of Department)**
Date_____	**Date: _____**

DEDICATION

This project is First, dedicated to God Almighty for His steadfast love, mercy, and grace upon me, and for seeing me through the course of my academic Journey in the University of Benin. Also this project is dedicated to My Mom and all who in one way or another contributed to my Progress in the course of my academic Journey

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Before European powers came to Africa, the continent was full of rich cultures, strong kingdoms, and well-organized societies. African civilizations developed on their own, with advanced systems of government, trade, art, and building. [1] The pyramids in Egypt, the Great Zimbabwe stone walls in Southern Africa, and the beautiful bronze works of the Benin Empire in West Africa are just a few examples. [2] These achievements show that Africa had greatness long before the arrival of Europeans. However, things began to change in the 19th century when European powers decided to take over African lands. At the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, European countries met and divided Africa among themselves without asking Africans for their opinion. They treated the continent like a cake to be shared, ignoring the cultures, languages, and traditions of the people who already lived there.[3]

After that, European powers invaded Africa, and took control of their territories by force, and placed their own leaders in power. Almost every part of Africa fell under European rule. The British took over areas in West and East Africa like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda.[4] The French controlled much of West and Central Africa, including Senegal, Mali, and Ivory Coast. Portugal ruled places like Angola and Mozambique, while Belgium took over the Congo.[5] Only Ethiopia was able to resist

colonization, winning a major battle against Italy in 1896 under Emperor Menelik II.[6] Colonial rule caused great harm to Africa. Africans lost control of their land and resources, their economies were changed to benefit Europe, and many were forced to work in terrible conditions. Borders were drawn without thinking about local communities, causing division and conflict that still affect African countries today.[7]

Over time, Africans became more determined to fight for their freedom. People who had gone to school abroad or fought in World War II came back ready to challenge colonial rule. They started protests, created political movements, and demanded independence. Across the continent, countries began to gain their freedom, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence in 1957, and many others soon followed.[8] This period of independence gave Africans hope for a better future where they could govern themselves, develop their economies, and restore their cultures.

But after gaining independence, African leaders realized that their countries were still weak and divided. Colonialism had left behind artificial borders and deep divisions. African nations knew they needed to unite and work together to protect their freedom and grow stronger. This led to the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963.[9] The goal of the OAU was to bring African countries together, promote unity, support countries still under colonial rule, and help solve problems within the continent.[10] At first, the OAU gave hope that Africa could stand on its own, but over time,

it became clear that the organization was not strong enough. It had no real power to stop wars, prevent corruption, or hold leaders accountable.[11] Many African leaders continued to act in their own interest instead of working together.

Because of these problems, the OAU was seen as a failure. In 2002, it was replaced by the African Union (AU), a new organization with a stronger structure and broader goals. The AU was created to not only promote unity but also support development, human rights, peacekeeping, and good governance across the continent.[12] It aimed to learn from the mistakes of the OAU and build a better future for Africa. Although challenges still exist, the creation of the AU marked a new beginning in Africa's journey to heal from its colonial past and work toward lasting progress and unity. In subsequent chapters we will examine the creation of the Organization for African Union, it's failures and the creation of the African Union. We will also examined the performance of the African Union, and access to what extent it has been able to achieve the aims and objectives it set out to achieve during its establishment, and then we will examine the failures of the African Union since it's creation.

Aim and objectives

The aim of this work is to examine Nigeria's role in the formation of the African Union in 2002. The objectives of this work include:

1. To examine the era of Colonialism and the Struggle for African Independence

2. To analyze the the formation and failures of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)

3. To explore the birth of the African Union (AU) and Nigeria's Role in Its Formation

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is from early 1990s and 2002, focusing on Nigeria's involvement in the transition from the OAU to the African Union. This timeframe was chosen because it captures the key events, summits, and diplomatic efforts that led to the AU's formation, where Nigeria played an active and influential role.

Research Methodology

This study will make use of the historical research method. This means that the work will look at past events and records in order to give a clear and detailed understanding of the topic. To achieve this, both primary and secondary sources of information will be used. Primary sources, which are original materials that provide first-hand information, will be utilized. These primary sources will include interviews, academic journals and research papers, annual reports from organizations, news articles, and official press releases. These will help to give fresh and direct information on the subject.

In addition, secondary sources will also be used to support the study. Secondary sources, which are materials that explain, analyze, or discuss information that

has already been produced by others, will also be used. These include books written by scholars, journal articles, newspapers, and online publications. Such sources will help to provide background knowledge, different opinions, and explanations about the subject matter.

Literature Review

In the course of this research, attempts have been made to examine some works written previously that will be of great importance and benefit to this work. Firstly we will examine R.A. Dunmoye's book, "Nigeria and the Transition from the OAU to the African Union".[13] It is one of the most extensive and authoritative texts that details Nigeria's involvement in the transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU). The pages spanning 45 to 117 provide a concentrated account of the period leading up to the establishment of the AU, centering on Nigeria's direct involvement in the process. Dunmoye begins by laying a historical foundation for why the OAU, despite its symbolic importance, had become obsolete in addressing the evolving challenges of globalization, intra-African conflict, and economic underdevelopment. He establishes that Nigeria recognized this deficiency early and began lobbying for reform through diplomatic channels, even before the formal AU idea was announced. The book discusses how Nigeria initiated and supported dialogues among African leaders on the need for a more effective body that could address continental crises such as civil wars, constitutional instability, and economic stagnation.

Dunmoye further outlines the critical role of Nigerian leaders, particularly President Olusegun Obasanjo, in hosting strategy sessions, participating in AU blueprint discussions, and promoting African ownership of the reform process. Nigeria's commitment to funding meetings, sponsoring resolutions, and providing diplomatic leadership during the early 2000s is also emphasized. The author traces Nigeria's leadership role in key summits, such as the Lomé Summit of 2000 and the Lusaka Summit of 2001, where institutional proposals were debated. Nigeria's insistence on institutional reforms such as the establishment of the Peace and Security Council, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Pan-African Parliament is well-documented in this section.[14] This book is essential to the current research because it offers detailed information and insight into how Nigeria acted as a principal architect of the African Union, pushing not only for the AU's creation but also for its structural robustness. But it fails to discuss in details the reasons for the failures of the OAU necessitating the creation of the African Union. The void of which will be filled in this study.

Furthermore, In his paper From O.A.U to A.U: The Politics, Problems and Prospects of a Continental Union, C.O. Eghweree,[15] delivers an intensive political analysis of the shift from the OAU to the AU, with Nigeria prominently featured as a core state actor that drove the transition. Eghweree begins by explaining the political landscape of Africa in the 1990s, a time marked by post-Cold War transitions, increased internal conflicts, and growing demands for regional cooperation beyond political

declarations. Against this backdrop, he positions Nigeria as a key power broker that understood the strategic opportunity to reform the OAU and enhance Africa's global relevance. The article dives into Nigeria's use of political leverage in regional blocs such as ECOWAS and the G-15 to build consensus around the African Union agenda. Eghweree highlights how Nigeria's foreign policy orientation during the Obasanjo administration shifted decisively toward multilateral diplomacy, with a strong Pan-African rhetoric aimed at leading Africa into a new institutional era.[16]

The author provides documented examples of how Nigerian representatives used their positions in international organizations to advocate for the AU's legal and operational frameworks. He also points out how Nigeria actively influenced the drafting of the Constitutive Act of the AU, ensuring that it included key clauses on human rights, democratic governance, and continental intervention in cases of mass atrocities. Nigeria's insistence on these provisions reflected both its experience in regional peacekeeping and its desire to enhance Africa's response capacity. Eghweree's work is essential to this research because it underscores the strategic use of political capital by Nigeria in both internal and continental arenas, showing how Nigeria's vision and actions were not incidental but foundational to the formation of the African Union. But it fails to explore the various means adopted by Africans in their struggle for independence, which is one of the major things that will be discussed in his study.

In continuation, A.S. Gusau's article Littering the Landscape: An Analysis of the Role of Nigeria in the Transition of O.A.U to the African Union,[17] takes a deeply analytical and somewhat critical approach to Nigeria's involvement in the formation of the African Union. Gusau traces Nigeria's transition from an active participant in the OAU to a self-appointed leader in the drive to establish a more effective continental union. He examines the specific roles played by Nigerian diplomats, military strategists, and heads of state in making the case for institutional reinvention. The article details Nigeria's influence in shaping AU mechanisms such as the Peace and Security Council, the African Peer Review Mechanism, and the African Standby Force. However, Gusau goes a step further by interrogating the real impact of these contributions. He questions whether Nigeria's involvement produced lasting structural changes or simply transferred old problems into a new institutional framework. The author uses detailed case studies to explore how Nigerian foreign policy during the transition was driven partly by its desire to maintain regional hegemony, not only altruistic Pan-Africanism. Yet, Gusau acknowledges Nigeria's unparalleled financial and military contributions, especially in stabilizing conflict zones such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, efforts that strengthened its case for leading the AU transition.[18] This article is crucial to this research as it introduces a critical lens that allows for a deeper evaluation of the intentions and outcomes of Nigeria's role, encouraging a balanced understanding of both its leadership and its limitations. It however fails to discuss to what extent the African Union has posed to be a better organization than the Organization of Africa union since it's creation.

Moreso, Halima Sa'adiyat Adamu's paper, "Nigeria's Role Since the Formation of Africa Union: Its Leadership Status in Africa",[19] focused on the post-formation era of the AU, and also provides valuable retrospective insight into why Nigeria played such a prominent role in its establishment. The article opens with a contextual background that highlights Nigeria's Pan-African credentials and its history of intervention in African affairs. Adamu meticulously outlines how Nigeria leveraged its size, population, economy, and diplomatic clout to insert itself into the AU's leadership structure right from the founding stages. She traces the roots of this dominance to the early 2000s, when Nigeria championed the drafting and ratification of the AU's Constitutive Act and helped shape the AU's governance architecture. Adamu links Nigeria's strong voice in matters like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and peacekeeping reforms to its earlier insistence that the AU be structured differently from the OAU, less passive, more proactive. The paper identifies key institutions such as the African Peace Facility and the African Governance Architecture as initiatives where Nigerian influence was embedded from the outset.[20] Additionally, Adamu outlines Nigeria's financial responsibilities, noting that it consistently ranked among the top contributors to AU operations, an indicator of its commitment to continental leadership from the formation phase onward. This paper supports the current research by showing how Nigeria's later leadership position in the AU was not accidental, but the product of deliberate strategic planning and early institutional engagement during the transition process. It however fails to examine the formation of the Organization for African Unity

as a catalyst to the creation of the African Union, the void of which will be filled by this research

Also, In "Nigeria's Role in Africa Union"[21], Saleh Dauda, offers a current and up-to-date assessment of Nigeria's evolving relationship with the AU, beginning from the formative phase of the early 2000s. Dauda's analysis highlights how Nigeria was not a mere participant but a principal designer of the AU's institutional identity. He opens with a historical recount of Nigeria's disappointment with the OAU's ineffectiveness, particularly in conflict mediation and democratic consolidation. This dissatisfaction motivated Nigeria to become one of the chief proponents of a stronger continental union. The paper carefully documents Nigeria's early advocacy for reforms, including the transformation of the Assembly of Heads of State into a more structured, decision-making body within the AU. It also provides a detailed account of Nigeria's contribution to the African Peace and Security Architecture, where Nigeria played a strategic role in creating protocols, funding early missions, and training peacekeeping troops. Dauda also discusses Nigeria's role in pushing for the establishment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Court of Justice, institutions designed to promote good governance, justice, and human rights on the continent.[22] Importantly, this work includes contemporary reflections on how Nigeria's foundational input in the AU shaped its long-term vision for Africa, making it highly relevant for this research. It reinforces the idea that Nigeria's influence during the formation of the AU was both foundational and transformative, laying the groundwork

for the continental body's current structure and function. Inspite of its usefulness to this research, it fails to examine the era of Colonialism and the Struggle for African Independence, necessitating the creation of the African organizations. This study hopes to fill this void.

Furthermore, Istifanus Iyima Idasho's book, Aspects of Nigeria's Role in the African Union,[23] is a massive scholarly work that investigates the many layers of Nigeria's engagement with the African Union. In the chapters spanning pages 345 to 666, the author focuses squarely on the formation stage of the AU, offering an encyclopedic examination of how Nigeria contributed to conceptual debates, institutional frameworks, diplomatic negotiations, and operational plans. Idasho begins by reviewing the evolution of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence, showing a clear historical path that led Nigeria to adopt continental leadership as a central tenet of its international relations. The book then moves into Nigeria's leadership role in the transition process, detailing its involvement in every major summit, working group, and legal drafting committee that designed the AU's governing documents.

Nigeria's contributions to the African Economic Community, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the development of the AU's conflict-resolution framework are explored in depth. Idaho also includes detailed profiles of Nigerian diplomats and policy-makers, their strategic maneuvers, and the way they shaped continental consensus.[24] The book explains how Nigeria's articulation of African

problems, from economic underdevelopment to regional security threats, was crucial in framing the AU's objectives and organs. For this research, Idasho's work serves as both a primary and secondary source, offering deep insights, verified data, and analytical depth that thoroughly map Nigeria's hand in the AU's creation. The book however fails to examine the failures of the OAU, necessitating the rise of the African Union, the research hopes to fill this gap.

CHAPTERIZATION

Chapter One: Background to the Study

This chapter will introduce the entire work by giving a background to Africa's pre-colonial greatness, the disruption caused by European colonization, and the continent's long struggle for independence. It will briefly highlight how colonialism left Africa politically divided, economically dependent, and socially fractured. The chapter will then touch on how, after gaining independence, African nations recognized the need to unite and protect their shared interests, leading to the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. It will outline the overall objectives of the study, the research problem, and the significance of understanding the journey from the OAU to the African Union (AU), as well as the role of countries like Nigeria in that process.

Chapter Two: Colonialism and the Struggle for African Independence

This chapter will explore the colonial experience in detail, examining how Africa was partitioned during the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 and how European powers

ruled various parts of the continent. It will discuss the negative effects of colonialism, such as economic exploitation, forced labor, cultural erasure, and the drawing of artificial borders that caused long-term conflicts. The chapter will then focus on how these injustices sparked nationalist movements across Africa, leading to mass resistance, political activism, and, eventually, independence. The role of war veterans, students, educated elites, and traditional leaders in pushing for freedom will be discussed, as well as a summary of key African nations and their years of independence.

Chapter Three: The Formation and Failures of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)

This chapter will examine how African leaders, after independence, came together to form the OAU in 1963 as a way to promote unity, support anti-colonial struggles, and defend the sovereignty of African states. The chapter will analyze the goals of the OAU and its early contributions, such as helping to end colonial rule in countries like Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. However, the focus will shift to its weaknesses: its non-interference policy, inability to stop civil wars and coups, and lack of enforcement power. It will also explore internal divisions among African states and how the OAU became largely symbolic by the end of the 20th century, failing to effectively address the continent's growing political and economic challenges.

Chapter Four: The Birth of the African Union (AU) and Nigeria's Role in Its Formation

This chapter will focus on the transition from the OAU to the African Union in 2002, showing how African leaders saw the need for a stronger and more responsive continental body. It will explain how the African Union was built to correct the failures of the OAU by promoting not just unity, but also development, security, democracy, and human rights. The chapter will highlight Nigeria's central role in this transformation, through diplomacy, leadership, and peacekeeping efforts. It will discuss the involvement of Nigerian leaders, especially President Olusegun Obasanjo, in pushing for institutional reforms and regional cooperation. Nigeria's contributions to key summits, negotiation of the AU Constitutive Act, and its continued leadership in African affairs will be thoroughly examined.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This final chapter will summarize the main points discussed throughout the study. It will reflect on how colonialism and its consequences made African unity necessary, how the OAU was formed in response but failed to live up to expectations, and how the AU emerged as a more structured and visionary organization. It will restate Nigeria's significant role in that transition and highlight the lessons Africa can learn from its past. The chapter will also suggest that, while the AU has made progress, continuous commitment, stronger institutions, and deeper cooperation are still needed for Africa to fully overcome the effects of its colonial past and build a united future.

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CHAPTER TWO

COLONIALISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR AFRICAN INDEPENDENCE

Colonialism refers to a scenario where one country takes control over another country or group of people, usually by force, and rules them for its own benefit. In this situation, the stronger country, often called the colonial power, makes decisions about the land, economy, culture, and even the politics of the weaker country, which is called the colony. The colonial power usually exploits the resources of the colony, such as minerals, crops, and labor, without giving fair returns to the local people. It also imposes its own systems of education, government, language, and religion, often weakening or erasing the traditions of the native people.[1]

Africa, also called the cradle of life, had already developed on its own long before foreigners came. Great civilizations rose across the continent, such as the kingdoms of Egypt, Nubia, Mali, Ghana, and Benin. These societies built strong governments, traded with other regions, created beautiful works of art, and developed systems of learning. For a long time, some Europeans tried to reduce these achievements by promoting what is known as the Hamitic hypothesis.[2] This false idea claimed that Africans could not have built these civilizations by themselves, and that it must have been foreigners, especially white or lighter-skinned people, who brought knowledge to them. However, modern history, archaeology, and even carbon dating have proved this wrong. The evidence shows that these civilizations were truly African. They were led,

built, and sustained by black people, and they existed long before Europeans even left their own continent to explore the world. This shows that Africa had a rich and independent history, with its own creativity and progress, and did not need outsiders to shape its greatness.[3]

However the Europeans were not satisfied with remaining in their own lands. By the 19th century, they became restless and were eager to find new places where they could gain wealth, power, and influence. After the decline of the transatlantic slave trade, their attention turned fully to Africa, not only for cheap labor but also for its rich natural resources and vast lands. This desire to dominate the continent led to the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885.[4] The Berlin Conference was organized by the German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, and it brought together 14 European powers, including Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, and Italy. The purpose of the meeting was to prevent conflict among themselves by agreeing on how to divide Africa. No African leader was invited, yet the future of the continent was being decided. During the meeting, they drew boundaries on maps, shared regions among themselves, and made rules for colonization, such as requiring countries to notify others before claiming new territories and to establish authority in any region they wanted to control.[5]

The impact of the Berlin Conference on Africa was very deep. It marked the beginning of the "Scramble for Africa," where European nations rushed to occupy African territories. Almost the entire continent came under foreign control within a few

decades. The boundaries they created did not respect African ethnic, cultural, or political divisions, which later caused serious conflicts. Africans lost their freedom, their resources were taken, and their traditional systems of leadership were replaced with foreign rule. Lands were exploited for raw materials like gold, rubber, palm oil, and diamonds, while Africans themselves were forced into labor. In the end, the Berlin Conference was not just a gathering but a turning point that changed Africa's history. It opened the door to colonization, exploitation, and the struggles that Africans would later face in their fight for independence.[6]

The 19th and early 20th centuries are often called the era of colonialism in Africa. This was a period when almost all parts of Africa were brought under the control of European powers by force. By the early 1900s, the continent had been divided among countries such as Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, and Spain. This division, known as the partition of Africa, was not based on the wishes of Africans but on European interests. The artificial boundaries created during this period ignored existing ethnic groups, kingdoms, and cultures, and this later became one of the major causes of disunity and conflict among African states.[7] Colonialism did not look the same everywhere. Each European country had its own style of ruling, which affected Africans differently. The British system was known as indirect rule. Instead of replacing traditional rulers completely, the British kept them but reduced their powers. Chiefs, kings, and village heads were forced to carry out British orders, collect taxes, and enforce colonial laws. On the surface, it looked like African rulers were still in charge, but in

reality, they were only carrying out the instructions of British officials. This method was cheaper for the British because they did not need too many European administrators, but it also weakened the authority of traditional leaders.[8] Over time, many chiefs lost respect among their people because they were seen as serving foreign masters instead of their own communities.

The French system was very different. The French believed in direct rule. This meant they wanted to control African societies more closely. Their idea was called assimilation, which meant Africans were expected to adopt French culture, language, and way of life. Later, they shifted to a softer version called association, but the idea remained the same: Africans were encouraged to act French but were never treated as equals to the French people. For example, in French West Africa, schools taught only in French, and African traditions were discouraged. While a few Africans could rise to higher positions by proving they were "civilized" in the French way, most were kept as subjects with no political rights.[9] The Belgian and Portuguese systems were even more harsh. In the Belgian Congo, for instance, the government used a centralized system with very strict controls. Africans were forced into hard labor to collect rubber and minerals under brutal conditions. Villages that failed to meet quotas were punished severely, sometimes through beatings or the destruction of homes.[10] Portugal, on the other hand, maintained colonies like Angola and Mozambique with heavy taxation and forced labor. People were made to grow crops for export rather than for their own survival.[11] These

systems were highly exploitative and left little room for Africans to participate in leadership or development.

In some parts of Africa, colonialism came in the form of settler rule. This means that many Europeans moved to Africa to live there permanently. They took over the best and most fertile lands, built large farms, and created economies that were meant to benefit themselves, not the Africans. The original African owners of the land were forced off their homes and farms, and many were made to work for the settlers for very little pay. This happened in places like Algeria, where the French settled, and in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe), which were under British control. It was also very common in South Africa, where Europeans created a system that gave settlers full rights and benefits but denied Africans equal rights.[12] Instead, Africans were treated as cheap labor and second-class citizens. This unfair treatment later grew into systems like racial segregation and apartheid, where Africans had no real freedom in their own land.

Another form of colonialism was through concession companies. In some regions, European governments allowed private companies to take control of huge areas of land and exploit resources like rubber, palm oil, timber, copper, and other minerals. These companies were given almost unlimited powers, and they often used violent methods to force Africans to work. This was common in places like the Congo Free State under King Leopold II of Belgium, where reports of cruelty, including amputations and

killings, shocked the world. It is important to note that colonial rule changed Africa's economy and society mainly to help Europe.[13] Africans were made to grow cash crops, work in mines, pay heavy taxes, and even do unpaid labor. Settlers took the best lands, which left Africans with little land, leading to hunger and suffering.

The harsh treatment of Africans in their own land naturally led to anger and revolts in different regions. Many Africans resisted colonial rule in various ways. Some refused to pay taxes, others ran away from forced labor, while many went on strikes, held protests, and even fought in wars such as the Maji Maji in Tanganyika and the Mau Mau in Kenya.[14] As time went on, resistance became more organized. Workers, students, and leaders came together to form unions, newspapers, and political groups that spread the message of Pan-Africanism and called for freedom. After World War II, African resistance grew stronger. Many African soldiers who fought in the war returned home demanding freedom, since they had risked their lives for Europe. At the same time, European countries had become weaker after the war, which made it harder for them to control Africa. Different groups of people played important roles in the struggle.

War veterans were highly respected in their communities because of their courage, discipline, and sacrifice during their time in the army. When they came back home, they did not just sit quietly. Instead, they became role models who encouraged other Africans to stand up and fight for their rights and freedom. Their stories of bravery gave people confidence that colonial rulers were not unbeatable.[15] Students and young

graduates also played a powerful role. On university and secondary school campuses, they created newspapers, debating clubs, and student unions. These platforms gave them the chance to share new ideas, question colonial rule, and spread the dream of independence. Their energy, intelligence, and creativity gave the nationalist movements fresh strength and direction. Educated elites such as lawyers, teachers, journalists, and civil servants also became very important. Unlike most of the population, they could read, write, and understand the colonial systems of law and government.[16] This allowed them to write political party programs, argue against unfair laws in court, and even take part in drawing up new constitutions for independent nations. They acted as the bridge between ordinary people's struggles and the political negotiations with colonial governments.

Traditional chiefs and local leaders had mixed roles. Some were close to colonial officials and acted in ways that supported foreign rule, but others resisted. Many chiefs defended their people's land from being seized, while some acted as mediators between their communities and the nationalist leaders. A number of them even joined the independence struggle directly, lending it traditional authority and local support.[17] Women also played a strong and often underestimated part in the struggle for independence. They organized boycotts against colonial products, and in markets they controlled food supplies to put pressure on the authorities. They also raised money to fund the movements.[18] Beyond this, women served as secret messengers, carried supplies, and cooked for freedom fighters hiding in the forests. In some cases, they even took up arms themselves and fought alongside men. Their courage and sacrifice showed that the

independence struggle was not just a men's movement but a collective effort of the whole society. All of these different groups, veterans, students, educated elites, chiefs, and women, joined hands in different ways. Each group brought its own strength, and together they created a strong wave of resistance that eventually broke the hold of colonialism and opened the path to freedom across the African continent.

Independence in Africa did not happen all at once but came in stages. The first stage was in North Africa. Libya became free in 1951, Egypt gained formal independence in 1922 though Britain still had control for years, and Morocco and Tunisia followed in 1956. Sudan also became independent in 1956.[19] The second stage came between 1957 and 1962 in West and Central Africa. Ghana was the first in 1957, Guinea in 1958, and then many others in 1960, which is called the "Year of Africa." In East Africa, Tanganyika became free in 1961, Uganda in 1962, Kenya in 1963, and later Tanganyika joined Zanzibar to form Tanzania in 1964.[20] Southern Africa's independence was slower because white settlers held strong power and apartheid ruled South Africa. Zambia and Malawi became free in 1964, Botswana and Lesotho in 1966, and Eswatini (then Swaziland) in 1968. Zimbabwe only gained independence in 1980 after a long war, Namibia in 1990, and South Africa ended white-minority rule in 1994. The Portuguese colonies also gained freedom after Portugal's 1974 revolution: Guinea-Bissau (1974), Mozambique and Angola (1975), Cape Verde (1975), and São Tomé and Príncipe (1975). Djibouti became independent in 1977, and Eritrea after a long struggle in 1993. Ethiopia

was one of the few countries that had remained free, except during Italian occupation (1936–1941).[21]

Independence was a very big achievement for Africans because it marked the end of many years of suffering under colonial rule. However, when freedom came, it also revealed many heavy problems that colonialism had left behind. One of the biggest problems was the economy. Most African countries depended on just one or two products, like cocoa, groundnuts, coffee, or minerals such as gold and copper. This made their economies weak because if the price of these products dropped in the world market, the whole country would suffer. Instead of building balanced economies with factories and industries, colonial powers had mainly focused on taking raw materials out of Africa to Europe. Another serious problem was poor infrastructure. The roads, railways, and ports that colonialists built were not meant to help Africans connect with one another or develop trade between regions.[22] They were mainly designed to carry goods, such as crops and minerals, from the inside of Africa to the coast for export. This meant that after independence, Africans found themselves with transportation systems that served European needs, not African unity or development.

Colonialism also created political problems. European powers had drawn borders on maps without caring about the ethnic groups or communities living there. As a result, many different groups were forced to live together in one country. This sometimes led to misunderstandings, tribal rivalries, coups, and even full-scale civil wars. At the

same time, very few Africans had been trained to take over important jobs such as doctors, engineers, administrators, or government leaders. The colonial powers had not prepared Africans for self-rule, so at independence, there was a shortage of skilled people to manage the new nations. On top of these internal struggles, there was also external pressure, which was made evident during the Cold War, African leaders were often pushed to take sides between the United States and the Soviet Union.[23] This sometimes caused more division and brought about political instability. Many countries also fell into heavy debt because they borrowed money for development projects but did not yet have strong economies to pay back those loans.

Even with all these challenges, independence was still a major turning point. It gave Africans the opportunity to make their own laws, write their own constitutions, and decide how they wanted to be governed. It also encouraged the growth of schools and universities, which helped to educate the next generation of leaders. Local languages and cultures began to be valued again, after years of being ignored under colonial rule. Africans also began to plan their own future according to their needs, instead of following European interests. Another important result of independence was the move towards unity. African leaders realized that no single country could solve all these challenges alone, so they began to work together. One of the earliest efforts was the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963.[24] The OAU was formed to encourage African unity, help solve conflicts between countries, and support nations that were still fighting for freedom. This spirit of cooperation showed that, despite the

problems left by colonialism, Africans were determined to shape their destiny and work towards a brighter future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, colonialism deeply shaped Africa's history. Before Europeans arrived, Africa already had great civilizations, trade networks, and rich cultures. But the Berlin Conference and the scramble for Africa led to foreign domination, exploitation of resources, and the weakening of African traditions and leadership. Different colonial systems, whether British indirect rule, French assimilation, or harsh settler and company rule, brought suffering, forced labor, and loss of land. Yet Africans resisted in many ways. War veterans, students, educated elites, chiefs, and women all played key roles in fighting for independence. Freedom came gradually across the continent from the 1950s to the 1990s, marking a major victory. Still, colonialism left behind serious problems such as weak economies, artificial borders, and a lack of skilled professionals. Despite these challenges, independence gave Africans the chance to rebuild, value their own cultures, and unite through organizations like the OAU to shape their future.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE FORMATION AND FAILURES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY (OAU)

In the early and mid-20th century, up until 1960, African states had gradually begun to break free from the hold of colonialism. Although many of them had already achieved independence, not all were free by 1960, and many more Africans still longed for independence. The countries that had gained freedom shared one common desire which was to assist those still under colonial rule in their struggle for independence and to unite in resisting the European powers that had once colonized them.[1] This important aim led to the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), an organization formed to help Africa rise out of its misery and to build a continent the world had never seen before, one united in purpose. In the following sections, we will examine why the OAU was created, what it tried to achieve, what it actually accomplished, and why, over time, it was unable to solve many of Africa's greatest challenges.[2]

Before the formation of the OAU, African leaders and thinkers had been speaking about something called Pan-Africanism. This was the belief that all African people, no matter where they lived on the continent or even outside it, should see themselves as one and should work together for the progress of Africa. As the years passed and more African countries gained independence, this belief became stronger and much more needed, because leaders realized that freedom alone was not enough. They needed unity

to protect their freedom and to give Africa a stronger voice in the world.[3] However unity was very difficult because the leaders did not all think the same way about how it should be done. Some leaders believed that Africa should join very closely, forming a single union where all countries would act almost like one nation. They imagined that this kind of strong unity would make Africa powerful and able to defend itself against outside influence. On the other hand, other leaders thought differently, instead they believed that each country should remain fully independent, keeping control over its own government, economy, and decisions, while still cooperating with others.[4]

These two ways of thinking divided the leaders into two major camps. One camp supported the idea of strong and immediate unity, while the other supported the idea of loose cooperation and gradual progress. These differences almost brought tension to the African leaders, but they realized that unity was one of their topmost priority and so in spite of all their disagreement, they had to work together and build a single body where all African countries could come together, talk about their challenges, and plan for their future. That body became the Organization of African Unity, which gave Africa a common roof under which its leaders could at least begin the long journey of cooperation. A major occurrence that happened in Africa took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on May 25, 1963.[5] On that day, thirty-two independent African states gathered under the invitation of Emperor Haile Selassie to take an important step toward unifying themselves and the continent. They came together to sign the Charter of the Organization of African Unity, which created an official body for cooperation, and they also agreed

that they would continue to meet regularly to discuss the problems facing the continent. From that moment onward, African leaders finally had a common place where they could sit, talk, plan, and speak with one voice. The new forum created a sense of belonging among leaders, reduced tensions and quarrels between countries, and gave hope to people who were still under colonial rule or suffering under apartheid.[6]

The goals of the OAU (Organization for African Unity) were simple. The first goal was to promote unity and solidarity among African states so that the continent could stand together. The second was to help bring an end to every form of colonial rule and apartheid still existing on the continent. The third goal was to protect the independence and territorial integrity of each member state, so that no country would lose its hard-won freedom. The fourth was to encourage cooperation in important areas of life such as education, health, trade, and transport, which were all necessary for development.These goals were built on strong rules that the leaders agreed on together.[7] They agreed that every country's independence should be respected, that no state should interfere in the matters of another, that problems between countries should be solved in a peaceful way, and that the borders that existed at the time of independence should be accepted. At that time, these rules seemed reasonable because many new states were still weak and were very afraid of being controlled or influenced from outside. The leaders wanted stability after long years of struggle and suffering. However later on they realized that the very rule of non-interference created limits that weakened the OAU whenever serious crises arose on the continent.[8]

To carry out its goals, the OAU set up some simple organs to guide its work. The highest body was the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, where presidents and prime ministers came together to decide about decisions to carry out. Below it was the Council of Ministers, made up of foreign ministers, who prepared the plans and decisions. Also, the General Secretariat based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia oversaw daily activities of the organization. The OAU also created special committees when needed, and the most important of these was the Liberation Committee, which worked for many years from Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.[9] This committee helped groups that were still fighting against colonial rule by giving them money, training, safe routes, and international support. The Liberation Committee became the OAU's first big success, and it showed the importance of the OAU's structure. Through this committee, the OAU helped countries that were still under colonial control, and it played a big role in the struggles in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, which were under Portuguese rule.[10]

Furthermore, it supported movements in Southern Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe) and in Namibia, which was under South African rule. The OAU also stood firmly against apartheid in South Africa. By recognizing liberation groups, bringing them together, giving aid, and pushing the United Nations and other world bodies to act, the OAU kept decolonization at the front of world attention. Even though the OAU did not bring an end to colonialism on its own, it added real strength to the movements and international pressure that finally achieved it. Inspite of all these advantages however, some of the rules made by the OAU caused serious problems between African countries later on.[11]

For instance, the rule of Respect for borders of each neighboring State. Concerning this, the OAU took a firm stand, saying that the borders at the time of independence should be respected. This decision was meant to stop countries from constantly changing borders and to prevent the wars that could happen because of that. In many cases, it worked, because it gave a clear rule that everyone could follow. But it also left some conflicts frozen, and it made other problems harder to solve, this is because respecting old borders did not bring peace sometimes.[12] In such cases, the OAU tried to help settle these disputes, but it did not have enough power or tools to make a final solution happen.

Also, the OAU had a rule called non-interference, which meant that one country should not get involved in the internal affairs of another. This rule was meant to protect the independence of new states and to reduce the fear that stronger countries would dominate weaker ones. At first, it helped maintain peace between neighbors. But the same rule also became a problem when leaders mistreated their own people. When dictators took power, when elections were stolen, or when soldiers overthrew governments, the OAU often did nothing, not because it didn't want to, but because in doing so, it would go against its own rule. It could talk and make statements, but it rarely acted beyond just this. In cases of serious suffering, this meant that ordinary people had little protection from the region.[13]

Because of this non-interference rule and because the OAU had no army of its own, it struggled to deal with civil wars and military coups across the continent. In the

late 1960s, Nigeria faced a violent civil war. The OAU tried to help, but it could not stop the fighting. During the Cold War, powerful outside countries supported different sides in conflicts in places like Angola and the Congo. The OAU had no way to enforce peace or prevent foreign weapons from entering these conflicts.[14] Between the 1970s and 1990s, many African countries experienced coups, with leaders removed overnight and replaced by soldiers. The OAU condemned some of these takeovers, but it did not have strong rules or tools to stop them. As a result, coups and instability became common in many regions.[15]

Another problem for the OAU was that African countries were often divided among themselves. They did not always agree on which groups or movements to support in the fight for independence. Different countries had different interests, and history and language sometimes made these differences stronger. Some countries spoke English, some French, some Portuguese, and some Arabic, and these groups often formed separate blocs with different views. On top of that, the Cold War in the world pulled African countries in different directions. Some states aligned with Western powers, while others looked to the Eastern bloc. These divisions made it very hard for the OAU to act together. When decisions required agreement from everyone, these disagreements often caused delays or weakened the final choices. Even when leaders wanted to act, the OAU did not have enough power to do much.[16] Its Secretariat, which handled daily work, was small and did not have enough money, because many countries did not pay their fees on time, which made things harder. The OAU had no army to enforce peace, protect civilians, or

stop conflicts. It also had little legal power to punish countries that broke the rules. Most of the OAU's strength came from moral pressure and diplomacy. It could send observers, organize talks, and issue resolutions, but if a country ignored them, there was little it could do. Over time, this gap between what the OAU said and what it could actually do weakened its influence and credibility.[17]

The leaders of the OAU also knew that political freedom alone would not be enough if people did not have better living conditions. In 1980, they created the Lagos Plan of Action, which aimed to improve industries, farming, and trade between African countries. Later, in 1991, they adopted the Abuja Treaty, which planned the steps to build an African Economic Community based on smaller regional groups. These were bold ideas that were intended to improve the conditions in Africa, but many problems slowed them down. Countries had debt, weak infrastructure, and outside pressures, such as structural adjustment programs, which made it hard to follow through. Often, countries focused on surviving their own national problems instead of working on continental plans. As a result, many goals were missed, and much of the economic vision weren't achieved.[18] At the same time, the OAU worked on human rights. In 1981, it adopted the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, also called the Banjul Charter. This document explained the basic rights and duties of people and states in Africa. It also created the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to hear complaints and check reports from governments. However, the Commission had limited power, and

many governments ignored its recommendations. Without following up its recommendations in a strong way, the Charter could not protect people consistently.[19]

Moreso, after the Cold War ended, Africa faced both new opportunities and new problems. Civil wars in West and Central Africa became worse, and there were also mass violence and genocide in the Great Lakes region. The OAU tried to help by mediating between countries and supporting peacekeeping efforts led by the United Nations or by regional groups. But the OAU itself was small and did not have enough resources or power to act directly. At the same time, smaller regional organizations, such as ECOWAS in West Africa and SADC in Southern Africa, began to actively handle these conflicts, they sometimes even sent troops to stop fighting. This situation made it clear that the OAU was not built to act quickly or strongly in times of crisis. Its main role was to discuss problems, persuade leaders, and seek agreement. In the 1990s, when violence spread rapidly, this approach was not enough to protect people or keep peace.[20]

With all these problems, by the end of the 20th century, many people began to see the OAU as more of a symbolic organization than a real existing one. It still provided a place for leaders to meet, talk, and issue statements, but it rarely changed what was happening on the ground. The difference between the OAU's original goals and what it could actually achieve had become very large. Leaders and citizens realized that Africa needed a stronger organization, one that could do more than just to talk. They wanted a body that could promote closer unity between countries, support democracy, and, when

necessary, take action to stop wars, protect civilians, and prevent mass suffering.[21] The shortcomings of the OAU helped push Africa towards forming a new organization, and so in 1999, African leaders called for change. The Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in 2000, and the official launch of the AU in 2002, kept the same goal of African unity that the OAU had aimed for. But it also gave the new organization stronger powers to act when needed. For the first time, the AU made it clear that it had the right to step in a country, meddle in its internal affairs and take action if serious crimes were happening, such as war crimes, genocide, or other crimes against humanity. This meant that, unlike the OAU, the AU could go beyond just talking and trying to persuade leaders, it could intervene to protect people and prevent mass suffering when governments failed to act.[22]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the OAU was an important first step for Africa. It gave young countries a shared place where they could come together, especially when they were afraid of being weak or divided. It kept attention on the fight for freedom in the last colonies and on ending apartheid. It also taught African leaders how to meet, discuss problems, and think about the continent as a whole. However, the same rules that worked in 1963, especially strict non-interference and weak central institutions, made it hard for the OAU to protect people when their governments failed them. By the late 1990s, the OAU was mostly a place to talk rather than to act. The creation of the African Union came as a response to these problems. The story of the OAU shows that building unity is

very important, but it also shows that unity alone, without the power to act, cannot solve the hardest problems.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE AFRICAN UNION (AU) AND NIGERIA'S ROLE IN ITS FORMATION

The story of African unity is closely tied to the creation of the Organisation of African Unity, commonly called the OAU, which was officially established on 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. At that time, many African countries were still struggling to gain independence from colonial powers that had ruled them for decades. The OAU was created because African leaders realized that the continent needed a shared platform where countries could work together, support each other, and defend themselves from any attempts by foreign powers to interfere in their affairs. The idea was that African nations could be stronger and safer if they acted together rather than alone.[1] Leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania imagined a united Africa that could stand proudly on the world stage, make its own decisions, and protect the rights and interests of its people. They wanted a continent where countries could solve problems together and resist domination or exploitation by outside powers.[2]

In its early years, the OAU achieved some very important successes. It actively supported liberation movements in countries that were still under colonial rule, such as Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, helping them in their fight for independence. The OAU also worked to prevent colonial powers from returning and taking back control. In addition, it created a platform for African countries to talk to each other, share ideas, and

resolve disagreements peacefully. These early efforts gave hope to millions of Africans and created a sense of shared purpose and unity across the continent. The OAU became a symbol of freedom and African solidarity, showing that African countries could stand together in the face of challenges.[3]

However, as the years passed, especially by the 1980s and 1990s, the weaknesses of the OAU became more obvious. One of the most important problems was the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. This rule was meant to respect the independence and sovereignty of each country, but in practice, it made the OAU powerless to act when serious problems occurred inside a country. For example, during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, hundreds of thousands of people were killed, and millions suffered, but the OAU could not stop the killings or prevent the humanitarian disaster. Similarly, in countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Sudan, conflicts escalated because the OAU could not force governments or leaders to stop fighting or commit to peace agreements.[4] This principle of non-interference meant that dictators could continue ruling harshly, ethnic conflicts could grow worse without checks, and human rights violations often went unchallenged.

Another major weakness of the OAU was its decision-making process, which required all member countries to agree, a system known as consensus. While consensus was intended to ensure that every country had a voice, in reality it often slowed down decisions or blocked action completely. Even when leaders knew there were serious

problems, they could not act quickly because some member states would refuse to agree to measures that might limit their own power or challenge their authority. This often left the OAU unable to respond effectively to crises, even when urgent action was needed. The combination of non-interference and the requirement for consensus meant that the OAU, despite its noble goals, struggled to protect ordinary people, enforce human rights, or maintain peace when conflicts erupted.[5]

By the 1990s, it was clear that Africa needed a new approach. While the OAU had succeeded in uniting the continent and helping achieve political independence, it was not strong enough to deal with modern challenges, including poverty, poor governance, internal conflicts, and human rights violations. African leaders began to discuss the need for a stronger, more effective organization that could act decisively, promote development, and protect the lives and rights of citizens. The experiences of the 1980s and 1990s showed that unity alone was not enough; the continent also needed institutions that could enforce laws, respond to emergencies, and guide Africa toward sustainable growth and peace. These failures of the OAU set the stage for the creation of the African Union, a new organization designed to learn from the past and provide solutions for the future.[6]

The first important step toward creating the African Union happened at the Sirte Summit in Libya in 1999, which was organized by the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi. This summit brought together the leaders of African countries to carefully look at the

weaknesses and failures of the Organisation of African Unity. At this meeting, leaders discussed the need for a new organization that could deal with the problems Africa was facing in the modern world. They recognized that the OAU, while helpful in uniting African countries and supporting independence in the past, was no longer strong enough to handle conflicts, enforce human rights, or promote economic growth. During the summit, leaders agreed that Africa needed a new continental body that could respond quickly and effectively to crises, support sustainable development, and maintain peace and security across the continent.[7]

The summit ended with the adoption of the Sirte Declaration, a very important statement that clearly said Africa needed a union that could protect its people, promote peace, defend human rights, and encourage development. The Declaration stressed that Africa needed to solve its own problems rather than relying on help from foreign countries. It also pointed out that the OAU had often failed to resolve conflicts or improve governance in a consistent way. Leaders at Sirte understood that a new organization needed a strong legal framework and proper institutions that could take action when necessary, rather than simply making resolutions that were often ignored. This marked the beginning of a serious process to create the African Union, which would learn from the mistakes of the OAU and provide real solutions for Africa's challenges.[8]

After the Sirte Summit, African countries began detailed discussions to write the African Union Constitutive Act, the main legal document that would officially define the

AU's powers, duties, and organizational structure. These discussions involved committees of experts, diplomats, and legal scholars from many African countries, who worked together to ensure that the AU would be much stronger and more capable than the OAU. The Constitutive Act was designed to give the AU the power to intervene in cases of serious crimes, such as war crimes, genocide, or crimes against humanity, something the OAU could not do because of its strict non-interference rules.[9]

The Constitutive Act also created new institutions to help the AU manage political, social, and economic issues across Africa. One of these was the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which was tasked with preventing conflicts and resolving disputes before they escalated. Another was the Pan-African Parliament, which was meant to give African citizens a voice and promote democratic dialogue. The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights was established to protect fundamental rights and hold violators accountable, while the African Commission on Democracy, Governance, and Human Rights was created to monitor governance, democracy, and human rights across the continent. Unlike the OAU, the AU was built with clear authority and enforcement powers, allowing it to act decisively where the OAU had failed in the past.[10]

Nigeria played a key and active role in this process at every stage. Being the most populous country in Africa and one of the largest economies, Nigeria had great influence in shaping decisions that affected the continent. The country had a long record of diplomatic leadership, peacekeeping, and support for development across Africa.

Nigeria's involvement in creating the AU was not just symbolic; it was practical, strategic, and multifaceted. Through its experience in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Nigeria had already led peacekeeping missions and mediation efforts in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau. This gave Nigeria credibility, experience, and moral authority, which it used to advocate for a stronger African Union that could take real action to protect its people, promote stability, and encourage cooperation among African nations.[11]

During the period when Africa was moving from the OAU to the African Union, President Olusegun Obasanjo, who was Nigeria's leader at the time, played a very central and important role. Obasanjo strongly believed in the idea of African unity and self-reliance. He wanted African countries to solve their own problems, work together, and take control of their future, instead of depending too much on foreign countries. To achieve this, Obasanjo worked closely with other key African leaders who shared the same vision. These included Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, and Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria. Together, they promoted the idea of a new, stronger continental organization that could address Africa's modern challenges, including conflicts, poor governance, and economic underdevelopment.[12]

Obasanjo personally attended many important summits that shaped the creation of the AU. These included the Sirte Summit in Libya in 1999, where the first discussions about replacing the OAU were held, the Lomé Summit in Togo in 2000, where detailed

planning and proposals were considered, and the Durban Summit in South Africa in 2002, where the AU was officially launched. At these meetings, Obasanjo made strong and persuasive speeches, highlighting Africa's need for unity, development, and peace. He was also actively involved in negotiating the details of the African Union Constitutive Act, making sure that the AU would be a practical, effective, and action-oriented organization. Through his leadership, Nigeria's vision of a strong and capable AU was clearly reflected in the final legal framework.[13]

Nigeria's contributions went far beyond just diplomacy. The country provided financial support, helping fund the formation of the AU and its various committees. Nigerian legal experts and diplomats were deeply involved in the drafting of the Constitutive Act, ensuring that the AU would have the legal authority to act in crises, protect human rights, and promote good governance and development. Nigeria also hosted several regional consultations to gather input from other African countries, showing a commitment to inclusivity and cooperation.[14] Furthermore, Nigeria used its political and military experience to influence the creation of the AU's Peace and Security Council, helping to design systems and strategies for rapid and effective response to conflicts on the continent.[15]

After the African Union was officially launched in Durban, South Africa, in 2002, Nigeria continued to play a leading role. The country provided troops, funding, and guidance to AU-led peacekeeping missions in countries such as Sudan (Darfur), Somalia,

and Mali, as well as other areas facing conflicts. Nigerian diplomats and leaders were often called upon to mediate disputes, support democratic governance, and advise on development initiatives across the continent. Nigeria also promoted important AU-linked programs such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which focused on economic growth and poverty reduction, and supported the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which encouraged African governments to improve governance, protect human rights, and operate transparently.[16]

The creation of the African Union was therefore much more than just changing the name of the OAU. It was a decisive step toward fixing the political, economic, and structural weaknesses that had held Africa back for decades. The AU was designed to have strong institutions, clear legal powers, and practical tools to intervene in crises, promote peace, and encourage development, something the OAU could not do effectively. Nigeria's leadership, diplomacy, legal and intellectual contributions, and peacekeeping efforts were absolutely critical in making this transformation possible. Under President Obasanjo, Nigeria helped ensure that the AU began its work on a strong, credible, and capable foundation. Nigeria's active role demonstrated the importance of strong national leadership in shaping the future of Africa, providing the AU with the guidance, resources, and tools it needed to respond to challenges, promote unity, and work toward a more peaceful, stable, and prosperous continent.[17]

Conclusion

The history of African unity began with the creation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, which aimed to bring African countries together, support independence, and protect the continent from foreign control. While the OAU had early successes, like helping liberation movements and encouraging dialogue among nations, it became weak over time because it could not intervene in crises or enforce decisions, and its requirement for full agreement among members often blocked action. By the 1990s, African leaders realized a stronger, more effective organization was needed, which led to the Sirte Summit in 1999 and the drafting of the African Union Constitutive Act. The AU was designed with clear powers to intervene in conflicts, protect human rights, and promote development. Nigeria, under President Olusegun Obasanjo, played a key role in shaping the AU, contributing diplomacy, financial and intellectual support, peacekeeping experience, and leadership at major summits. After the AU's launch in 2002, Nigeria continued to provide troops, guidance, and support for programs like NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism, helping the continent respond to conflicts, improve governance, and pursue development. The creation of the AU was therefore not just a renaming of the OAU, but a major step toward building stronger institutions, enforcing law, and working for a peaceful, united, and prosperous Africa, with Nigeria's leadership being central to this transformation.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Before Europeans came to Africa, the continent was home to rich cultures, strong kingdoms, and advanced societies with impressive achievements in government, trade, art, and architecture, such as the Egyptian pyramids, Great Zimbabwe, and the Benin bronzes. In the 19th century, European powers divided Africa among themselves at the Berlin Conference without consulting Africans and colonized almost the entire continent, exploiting its people and resources, and creating borders that caused lasting conflicts. Over time, Africans resisted colonial rule, fought for independence, and by the 1950s and 1960s, many countries gained freedom, starting with Ghana in 1957.

However, the legacy of colonialism left African nations weak and divided, which led to the creation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 to promote unity and support development, though it eventually proved too weak to stop conflicts or hold leaders accountable. To address these shortcomings, the African Union (AU) was established in 2002 with stronger institutions, a clearer mandate for peacekeeping, human rights, development, and good governance, marking a new chapter in Africa's efforts to unite, recover from colonialism, and build a better future.

Colonialism happened when European countries took control of African lands and people to benefit themselves. They used Africa's resources, forced Africans to work, and

imposed their own systems of government, language, and culture, often ignoring or destroying local traditions. Africa had already been home to great civilizations, such as Egypt, Mali, Ghana, and Benin, with strong governments, trade, and art, proving the continent's independence and creativity. In the 19th century, European countries met at the Berlin Conference (1884–1885) and divided Africa among themselves without asking Africans. This led to almost the whole continent being controlled by Europe, with borders drawn carelessly, traditional leadership weakened, and people treated unfairly.

Different colonial powers ruled in different ways, like the British using indirect rule, the French trying to assimilate Africans, and the Belgians and Portuguese exploiting people harshly. Africans resisted through protests, revolts, strikes, and armed struggles, while soldiers, students, women, chiefs, and educated elites all played important roles in pushing for independence. Independence in Africa came gradually between 1922 and 1994, starting with countries like Egypt, Ghana, and Libya, and ending with South Africa, Namibia, and other Portuguese colonies. Gaining freedom was a huge achievement, but Africans inherited many problems from colonial rule. Economies were weak, relying on a few export products, infrastructure served European needs, and artificial borders caused ethnic and political tensions.

Many countries also lacked trained leaders and faced external pressures from the Cold War, which sometimes worsened instability. Despite these challenges, independence allowed Africans to govern themselves, revive local cultures, and develop

education. Leaders also recognized the importance of working together, which led to the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. The OAU encouraged cooperation, supported countries still struggling for freedom, and showed that Africans were determined to shape their own future and work toward unity, peace, and development.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was created in 1963 to bring African countries together, support those still under colonial rule, and promote peace, unity, and development across the continent. It grew from the idea of Pan-Africanism, which encouraged Africans to see themselves as one people and work together. The OAU helped liberation movements, fought against apartheid, and gave African leaders a common place to discuss problems. However, it had many limits. Its rules of non-interference and respect for borders, the lack of an army, limited funds, and disagreements among countries made it weak in stopping wars, coups, and human rights abuses. Economic and social plans, like the Lagos Plan of Action and Abuja Treaty, were often delayed or unfulfilled. By the 1990s, people saw the OAU as mostly symbolic, doing little beyond talking. These weaknesses led African leaders to create the African Union (AU) in 2002, a stronger body that could not only promote unity but also intervene when serious crimes or conflicts threatened people, marking a new chapter in Africa's efforts to solve its challenges and protect its citizens.

The African Union (AU) was created to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which had united African countries and supported independence but was too weak to stop wars, protect human rights, or promote development. The AU was designed to fix these problems, giving clear powers, strong institutions, and the ability to act when serious crimes or conflicts occur. Nigeria played a key role in this process, with its leaders, diplomats, and experts helping draft the AU's legal framework, provide funding, and shape peace and security systems. Under President Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria worked closely with other African leaders to ensure the AU could respond to crises, promote good governance, and encourage economic growth. When the AU launched in 2002, it marked a new era where African countries could work together effectively, protect their citizens, and plan for a stronger, more united, and prosperous continent.

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