

**UCLA**

**Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies**

**Title**

Review: Promoting the African Union

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8hd0060j>

**Journal**

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 35(2)

**ISSN**

0041-5715

**Author**

Stuffelbeam, Katharine

**Publication Date**

2009

**DOI**

10.5070/F7352009571

**Copyright Information**

Copyright 2009 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

**Promoting the African Union** by Kassim Mohammed Khamis. Lillian Barber Press, Washington DC, 2008, 421 pages, \$56.00, ISBN 0936508337.

While reading *Promoting the African Union*, I was reminded of the huge ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) billboards I saw all over Ghana during my last visit in March 2009. ECOWAS's main campaign, in Ghana at least, was to solicit support for a single common West African currency to facilitate economic stability and promote trade between West African countries. When I asked my Ghanaian friends what ECOWAS was all about, and if they thought this common currency was a good idea, I received a variety of responses. Many people my own age seemed hopeful, often stating that if countries were able to come together they would have a better chance in the global marketplace, and possibly be able to stabilize the ever-increasing rate of inflation. In contrast to this youthful optimism, people of my parents' generation were less than enthusiastic and had more cynical views of ECOWAS, doubting that any unifying organization would ultimately succeed. These kinds of issues lie at the heart of *Promoting the African Union*. Khamis problematizes African unity politics in a practical way, providing a detailed description of Africa's long, tumultuous struggle towards decolonization and unification.

Khamis discusses at length the historical context, diplomatic processes, and challenges of many of the large regional unification organizations within Africa. Because the history of unification projects in Africa has been fraught with missed deadlines, inconsistency of leadership and membership, lack of financial resources, and so on, this text may be more disturbing than it is uplifting. Nevertheless, it has much to offer a persistent reader.

Khamis divides the book into four large sections: "Previous Challenges Which Confronted the Promotion of African Unity," "Establishment of the African Union and its Initial Progress," "An Analytical Survey of the Implementation of the African Union as of July 2005,"

and "What Could Be Done?" In this way he logically moves from the background and history of a unified governmental body that would represent all of Africa—culminating most significantly when the Organization of African Unity was established at the 1963 summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—to an extensive descriptive analysis of the process of establishing the African Union itself, roughly from 1999 to 2005. Part III provides a more historically grounded analysis of the same period, which gives the reader more perspective on the challenges and issues faced by these organizations.

In Part IV, Khamis more openly voices his opinions about what could have been done in many of the situations where the outcome was less than desirable. His practical approach and concrete structural recommendations throughout the book hold all the more weight since he himself has a significant background in African unity politics; he has held the position of General Secretariat for ten years, initially for the Organization of African Unity Political Department, and then for the African Union under the Directorate of Peace and Security (the book's foreword provides more biographical information). His attention to detail, inclusion of graphs and documents from the proceedings of many important council meetings and summits, and ability to clearly portray complex political issues show not only his prowess as a scholar but also his skill as a writer. Despite the more technically detailed portions of the book, Khamis keeps the prose accessible and includes select relevant social, cultural, and historical information to deepen the reader's understanding of the overall climate in African unity politics during the last fifty years or so.

*Promoting the African Union* gives a comprehensive historical analysis of the political challenges and events that have been involved in the attempt to unify and decolonize Africa. This book is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the complex history of African unity

and the many problems that policymakers face. It comes at an opportune moment as the thirteenth African Union Summit, "Investing in Agriculture for Economic Growth and Food Security," just took place June 24 through July 3, 2009 in Sirte, Libya.

While this book provides an in-depth historical analysis useful for those interested in (or directly involved in) African politics, government, and economic development, it does not seem to have a wide cross-disciplinary appeal. I do not mean to imply that Khamis intended to write for such a large audience; I would simply like to point out that *Promoting the African Union* is a very serious text committed to its thorough and detailed approach and quite unwilling to appease those who may be looking for lighter fare. Unfortunately, I imagine this will limit the book's readership, but those of us who want to understand the difficulties that have faced Africa, particularly since the colonial period, and are patient enough to read Khamis's detailed analysis, will benefit immensely from his even voice, integrity, and thoroughness.

**Reviewer:**

Katharine Stuffelbeam is a Ph.D. student in Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles Herb Alpert School of Music. Her primary research focuses on women's social dance music of the Dagbamba in northern Ghana.