

Namibia's attitudes towards pan-Africanism

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Our [Ghana's] independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent!

Kwame Nkrumah; Independence Speech, 5 March 1957

Introduction

Namibia is a child of pan-Africanism and internationalism. To all intents and purposes, Namibia is both the creation as well as the outcome of a multiplicity of attitudes held at different times by a number of countries in their own responses to the trajectory of the history of Africa's decolonisation. Such countries were on the African continent and elsewhere as they interacted with one another in international forums.

The Western European adventurism and expansionism by way of colonialism – notably the German Reich, the United Kingdom and the Union of South Africa, and, later, a growing number of countries as members of the United Nations (UN) – all led to the creation and acceptance of what is today the Republic of Namibia. Hence, these affirming words came from the first President of Namibia on the occasion of the country's Independence on 21 March 1990:¹

For the past 43 years or so, this land of our forbearers (sic) has been a bone of contention between the Namibian people and the international community on the one hand, and South Africa, on the other. The Namibian problem has been at the centre of bitter international dispute over the last four decades. The United Nations and other international bodies produced huge volumes of resolutions in an attempt to resolve this intractable problem ...

This background, and the manner in which Namibia achieved political independence and membership of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC),²

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1 Sam Nujoma, Inaugural Address at Independence, Windhoek, 21 March 1990.

2 The Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), the precursor to the current Southern African Development Community (SADC), was founded in Lusaka, Zambia, on 1 April 1980 with the aim of strengthening unity amongst southern African states against the onslaught of the South African apartheid regime and its machinations aimed at weakening its neighbour's economies. SADC had nine members at the time, namely Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The organisation was established on 17 August 1992, in Windhoek, Namibia, with an integration agenda that was

the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), the Commonwealth, and the UN, placed upon the new nation an onerous expectation not only to reciprocate the goodwill of others, but also to define new ways to interact and cooperate as regards international relations in Africa and a world that had been polarised by the infamous Cold War which formed the curtained divide between nations prior to the end of 1989. The timing of Namibia's independence brought with it an existentialist reality with attendant expectations that African nations hitherto had not held. Namibia, as the first real success story born of the activities of the international community, should have generated hope and aspiration from Africa in relation to the foreign policy orientation and outlook of this, the world's newest baby. Namibia was not only expected to, but also had an obligation to, extend its self-definition in the context of its foreign policy towards the international community in general and to Africa in particular.

After all, it was the African countries which had focused specially on and called world attention to the plight of the inhabitants of Namibia under foreign rule when Ethiopia and Liberia took the matter of Namibia's domination by South Africa to the International Court of Justice in November 1960, demanding that South Africa had no right to rule the territory that was placed under UN trusteeship.

After it attained independence in 1990, Namibia, as a country, paid scanty and episodic attention to what African issues should have been in the new world. Unlike Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, Namibia's foreign policy orientation in general and its attitudes towards pan-Africanism in particular can best be described as an extension of idioms of the liberation struggle, thus, based upon past experiences and individual hero-leaders' memories – not a well-thought-out policy undergirded by a set of fundamental principles monitored by a hierarchy of self-interests and values.

It would appear that post-independence African countries invariably do not appreciate the importance of receiving foreign aid beyond general, vague and casual pronouncements or reactions of leaders in response to a perceived readiness – or lack thereof – of richer nations to offer them foreign aid. African countries remain in the rut of internalised dependency on others, and formulate whatever they believe are their attitudes towards foreign nations, mainly in the context of what material aid they receive or wish to receive.

Namibia had followed the route of African countries – not states – in its tendency to conflate what ought to have been (their) national interest with historical experiences through which assistance was given to them during their liberation struggles. In this sense, they are unable to cast their eyes beyond the politics of being the underdog and

principally economic. The member states of SADC today are Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

towards the politics of the nation state³ in relation to other nation states, with their own national and strategic interests. This attitude was confirmed in Namibia's White Paper on foreign affairs in 2004 by the following admission:⁴

Namibia's bilateral relations can be placed within the historical context of the struggle for independence. The country attaches high value to the decisions of the United Nations and other international organisations, particularly the fraternity of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) (now the African Union), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as well as the Non-Aligned Movement ...

On account of the last 23 years of self-rule, Namibia's foreign policy towards the international community generally and Africa specifically has been more reactive than proactive. Where it did exist, it was in the heads and/or actions of the President or the first Minister of Foreign Affairs. As the vibrant experience of Independence celebrations dissipated, there was less of a discernible orientation that would have influenced the attitudes of state actors representing the Namibian nation. As a consequence, Namibia's attitudes towards pan-Africanism are to be found in actions that are admittedly progressive – but not as part of an existing policy as such. Today, 23 years after the celebrations of independence, Namibia remains by and large unclear about its own intrinsic values that would, in turn, inform strategic and theoretical formulations of what types of relations it has with the world, and what self-interests it should be pursuing. For instance, there is no theory that undergirds its main thrusts when it comes to negotiating relations with countries such as the United States of America on matters affecting precious resources, such as potentially the second richest source of uranium in the world. Using a healthier starting point, Namibia could exercise more influence in nuclear negotiations for Africa and in the world. This is because Namibia founds its self-definition to be in the paradigms of dependency and powerlessness, instead of self-worth and strength.

It would not be fair to accuse the Namibian political leadership of over 23 years to have been completely devoid of ideas on how to interact with the world because there have been interactions that have yielded good results for the country. What is clearly lacking is a theory or a set of well-thought-through and cogent theories that could assist the country's diplomats, Members of Parliament, business representatives and other role players in planning their interactions on the basis of sufficient knowledge and confidence.

3 African body politics invariably suffer a shortcoming in that they cannot understand the comprehensiveness of the juridical entity called *the state* – with the government, the organs of the government within their jurisdictions, the private sector, religious communities, civil society, and non-governmental organisations all being part of the state. African political elites cannot distinguish between the role of the ruling party at a point in time on the one hand, and the government and the state on the other. For the most part, the ruling elite see themselves as the government and the state. The *state*, in its original sense as the *Rechtsstaat*, is more than the government of the day and more than the party – however popular that party may be. See Verloren van Themaat & Wiechers (1967:4).

4 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004:63).

A theory is always helpful for purposes of knowledge, consistency, seamlessness and informed planning. It is also fair to say that Sam Nujoma and the first Minister of Foreign Affairs, Theo-Ben Gurirab, were in theory and deed the brightest beacons when it came to the country's foreign policy over the years. This is because they learned the art during the years of the liberation struggle – hence the following admission by the SWAPO Party of Namibia⁵ leadership in 2004:⁶

That the struggle was a great school of diplomacy is testified to by the vast international exposure availed in Namibia's would-be future foreign policy formulators and executors. For example, the President of SWAPO, Sam Nujoma, as the foremost champion of the then evolving Namibian national interest, was able to raise the movement's international profile, thereby placing the country's name on the world map. He trotted the globe, meeting and winning the support of a wide range of the world's historic figures, such as, Chou En-Lai of the People's Republic of China, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Josip Tito of Yugoslavia, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Leonid Brezhnev and Andrei Gromyko of the then Soviet Union, Olof Palme of Sweden, Indira Ghandi of India, Francois Mitterrand of France, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Agostinho Neto of Angola, etc. Meetings with these eminent statesmen, at the level of both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, were an invaluable apprenticeship for the future conduct of foreign policy.

This "school of diplomacy" for Namibian political freedom activists, who became the nation's leaders after Independence and after the Cold War, essentially prepared them poorly for navigating the nation in the context of the 'New World Order', as (then) US President George Bush Snr dared to define it. Namibian leaders continued to perceive themselves as junior diplomats. This background and context explain why Namibian leaders put on their best democratic behaviour when they interact with European leaders, and are more ostentatious when with African leaders. In fact, Namibian leaders are excellent articulators of democratic values when it comes to situations outside of their own contexts and leadership challenges back home.

Tenets of foreign policy

Successful, effective, transparent foreign policy grows out of a country's self-definition and relocation of what its most important or self-evident values are, measured by its seriousness as well as its success domestically and internationally. Such values may include human rights, national interests, commerce, the prevention of war, or a historically informed ideology such as South Africa's African Renaissance under President Thabo Mbeki⁷ and, to a lesser extent, under his predecessor, Nelson Mandela. This agenda

5 Originally the South West Africa People's Organisation; the name was changed to compete in Namibia's first-ever democratic elections in 1989.

6 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004:27).

7 It is well known that, after Kwame Nkrumah, it is Thabo Mbeki who articulated a clear vision for the continent. He electrified Africa and the African diaspora to take a different look at

was spelled out very clearly barely one month into Mandela's Administration, when he appeared as the first-ever South African head of state to address an OAU Meeting of Heads of State and Government in June 1994, when he declared South Africa's pan-African position to be as follows:⁸

The total liberation of Africa from foreign and white minority rule has now been achieved ... Where South Africa appears on the agenda again, let it be because we want to discuss what its contributions shall be to the making of the new African Renaissance ...

For clarity's sake, it is important to offer a general definition of what *foreign policy* is. In broad terms, *foreign policy* is a framework or a pattern of behaviours of actors within a state while they pursue their interests in relation to other states. A country's *foreign relations policy* is a formulation of a set or a series of self-interest strategies delineated and articulated by the state to inform, spearhead and guide the various actors within the state in their attitudes towards other countries' governments or even non-state actors with whom they interact or wish to establish relations in the furtherance of their national interests and world peace. These articulations and enunciations usually come by way of official pronouncements or declarations employed to define, clarify or guide, strategically, the various actors within the state when conducting business politically, commercially or otherwise with other countries or non-governmental organisations in other countries on matters concerning mutual interests or world peace in the context of today's globalising economies.

These official statements become the index of information and knowledge in a given state, to guide its official representatives in their dealings with the outside world so that there is confidence on their part and seamlessness of conduct to uphold the good name of the country. Such policies are evaluated and monitored from time to time to keep abreast of the present and of changes in the environment as well as the shifts in emphasis by different office-bearers in the country.

Conventionally, the creation or promotion of foreign policy is the business of the head of state or government. In addition, foreign policy is conducted through diplomatic channels, trade and commerce, strategic alliances and, occasionally, through warfare.

themselves as part of the global village that had a proclivity to marginalising Africa. When he used the words *African Renaissance* for the first time in Virginia, in the United States of America, on 21 April 1997, he said: "As Africans, we have a vision, a hope, a prayer that will come in the end ...". See Mbeki (1998:200).

- 8 It was made clear that the African Renaissance agenda would influence the post-apartheid South Africa's relations and interactions with other African countries. South Africa, under Mbeki – and, to a lesser extent, under Mandela – was driven by peace on the African continent and the need to develop African solutions to African problems, with a consciousness on the part of those representing South Africa to desist being seen as the 'Big Brother'. See "Statement of the President of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela", at the OAU Meeting of Heads of State and Government, Tunis, Tunisia, 13–15 June 1994.

All three traditional branches of a democratic state – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary – contribute to and play significant roles in the development and execution of a country's foreign policy. For administrative, practical and implementation purposes, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led by its Minister, is responsible for the day-to-day running and maintenance of foreign policy and foreign relations. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, or Secretary of State in other systems, is the chief advisor to the Head of State on foreign and international matters.

Foreign policy is by and large the extension of domestic politics and life. In other words, a country can only project that which it holds dear within its boundaries, where it wields complete sovereignty. The Namibian Government gave expression to this reality as follows, even though there has not been much consistency in this regard:⁹

Namibia's pursuit of its foreign policy objectives is no different, in this connection, from those of other nations. Indeed, our foreign policy is the flipside of the domestic order and its national priorities. In other words, it is the interpretation of internal policies to the outside world.

But the country's leadership neither drew from the very foundations upon which the Republic was established, nor made any serious efforts to build on what was indeed its rightful base as a starting point for meaningful and respectful foreign policy formulations. For instance, Namibia, by virtue of her healthy start on the basis of the exemplary manner in which she fashioned her constitutional multiparty democracy, was very well positioned to champion multipartyism and popular participation in leadership elections on the African continent. In the first 13 years of self-rule, Namibia excelled in many ways, gaining the moral high ground and rectitude to influence politics across Africa.

Instead, Namibia saw itself – and, arguably, continues to see itself – as a member of the international community rather than as a participant. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' vision statement, its articulated goal reads as follows:¹⁰

To achieve a peaceful, safe, stable and prosperity-enhancing world order that is predicated on the principles of diplomatic persuasion and multilateral approaches to interstate relations, a world order in which Namibia is able to become a developed country by the year 2030, i.e., having joined the ranks of high-income (with a GNP per capita of US\$7.911) economies.

The areas of influence for Namibia in relation to pan-Africanism ought to have gone beyond the idioms of liberation and, even, race. These areas of influence, treated in more detail below, include –

- human rights
- national interest
- regional integration

9 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004:ii).

10 (ibid.:vii).

- pan-Africanism
- negotiated (peaceful) resolution of conflict
- national reconciliation
- internationalism
- race relations
- corruption, and
- the land question.

Human rights

During its emergence as a new democracy, the most visible on the African continent at the time of its independence, and especially before South Africa stole its thunder, Namibia occupied a unique space availed to it to make an indelible impression on the minds of the international community. They were waiting for a country, big or small, to define the world differently, to reframe the role of the international community in general and Africa's role in the affairs of the world in particular. It must be added that not even Nelson Mandela succeeded in doing this beyond his disarming treatment of the white worlds that expected the worst forms of revenge from black South Africans.¹¹ Thus, in the years shortly after it had attained its independence, Namibia was responsible for conducting its foreign affairs in conformity with and for the amplification of international norms and values in respect of human rights, especially universal rights. For example, Namibia's position on human rights issues needed to be clarified and elaborated for the sake of those still suffering in Africa, by fostering guiding principles on how the new nation would engage with states that found themselves guilty of abusive human rights practices. These included Morocco, Nigeria and Western Sahara, to mention but a few. This would have been consistent with Namibia's position on apartheid South Africa at the time, to which President Nujoma sent a very strong message:¹²

President De Klerk's proclamation here today that South Africa has reached a final and irreversible decision to relinquish control over Namibia is an act of statesmanship and realism. This, we hope, will continue to unfold in South Africa itself.

At this moment, Namibia was under the watchful gaze of the international community as no African country had previously been, yet she made no mention of the unhappy state of affairs amongst the millions of inhabitants on the African continent still under the heavy yoke of oppressive regimes of one-party states. There was also no mention in this auspicious address of the role of the OAU and other continental or regional bodies in reorganising affairs on the African continent.

11 See Diescho (1996).

12 Sam Nujoma, Inaugural Address at Independence, Windhoek, 21 March 1990.

Here a qualification is necessary. Although Namibia was expected to have expressed itself on human rights issues in Africa as part of its pan-Africanist posture at Independence, it was not required to suspend relations with states violating their citizens' rights. Nor was the new small state expected to alienate potential allies by adopting hostile measures against them due to their domestic policies. All that was asked of Namibia, thus, was a pragmatic yet informed and future-oriented approach with which to influence a new form of dialogue better suited to deal with such states, and to bring honour to Africa in the New World Order.

In other words, the timing of Namibia's independence in March 1990, just after the discrediting of the so-called Marxist-Socialist rhetoric of the liberation struggle, and the fundamental changes and reconfiguration of the world order as the Cold War ended, offered developing nations more room to manoeuvre than ever before in terms of possible choices of policies and realignments.

National interest

Conventionally, nation states understand that they do not have friends or enemies, but rather a hierarchy of relations. The levels at which they engage with other nations in the international system differ and change from time to time in accordance with what they perceive are in their national interests. Commenting on the kinds of relations that new, post-apartheid South Africa under Nelson Mandela would pursue in relation to its neighbours and from the perspective of its national interests, the South African *Financial Mail* stated the following:¹³

Already President Mandela has indicated that he is aware of the need for a policy of "restraint and sensitivity" towards South African neighbours

It would appear that, at the time of Independence, Namibia had too many friends, and the new government was uncertain about its own national interests. This was the time to develop and formulate a sensible policy for dealing with other countries in the southern Africa region in relation to one another, on the one hand, and to South Africa on the other. The romantic associations surrounding the liberation struggle-cum-socialist tendencies needed redefinition and redirection to respond effectively to the post-bipolar world, and Namibia was the most well-placed country to articulate this reality. There are many parts of Africa which still have very little to do with Namibia except for being part of the continent, and it remains an expensive and futile exercise to pretend to share something in common with a country like The Gambia.

Indirectly, the application by Namibia to be admitted as a member of the Commonwealth on the basis of the need to be close to other African nations is a positive admission of the

13 "Foreign policy: A matter of interest"; *Financial Mail*, 27 May 1994, p 23.

urgency of belonging to the African family. It must be said, however, that the enthusiasm to belong to international organisations does not, by any means, demonstrate clarity about why membership is in the country's national interests.

What are *national interests*, then? Jack Spence makes the observation that *national interests* derive from "ideas which people have of the place which they would like their country to occupy in the world".¹⁴ Spence further avers that "[t]hese ideas change in time, apart from never being unanimous within a country at a given time".¹⁵

Jack Spence¹⁶ points out how –

conventional wisdom holds that a country's foreign policy requires the definition and ranking of national interests based on the immutable facts of geographic, economic and military capability together with a flexible and skilful diplomacy ...

In this context, Namibia's national interests should have been informed by the following elements:

- At the domestic level, Namibia needed to consolidate its democracy, and develop an economy with a built-in capacity to create jobs for sustainable economic growth
- A national programme to reduce socio-economic disparities
- A government and business agenda that gave priority to enhancing traditional links with the states of Europe and North America, and establishing new relations with the East Asian Tigers as well as Latin America, based on a reconsideration of Africa's role in the world
- A redefinition of *neighbourliness* and *regional integration* based on a growing measure of self-reliance – unilaterally at first, then bilaterally, followed by a regional assertion, and then a continental one
- A redefinition and re-launching of *regional infrastructural cooperation* to enhance the movement of goods and people in the region and on the continent, starting with Angola and South Africa as the pillars of Namibia's own economic growth
- Building on the high moral ground the country enjoyed at the time of Independence and elaborating an agenda for self-respect, national reconciliation, and peaceful settlement of national disputes in order to address the socio-economic inequalities and other ills left by apartheid and colonialism
- A comprehensive programme towards education reform in the southern African region to obviate difficulties that impede its regional integration, so that there is movement towards streamlining education policies to allow for an exchange of teaching personnel and students, and
- A comprehensive articulation of the importance of the unity of African development efforts as opposed to the earlier efforts towards liberation.

14 Spence (1995).

15 (ibid.).

16 (ibid.).

Regional integration

About a year after becoming the first President of a democratic Namibia, Sam Nujoma addressed SADCC in Windhoek and boldly stated Namibia's position on regionalism:¹⁷

...we of this sub-region[,] including a post-apartheid, democratic, united and non-racial South Africa[,] are fully committed to pooling our resources for the common good of our countries and peoples. It is also a further demonstration that the people of this region, even when the obnoxious system of apartheid is removed, will still have the need to reach out to one another for regional growth and prosperity. SADCC will, no doubt, provide the right framework for the community of nations of Southern Africa ... we are living in times where countries the world over are moving towards integrated production and trade areas. In our own sub-region, we have already made substantial progress in establishing a framework for future closer co-operation and must now examine more closely the modalities of a truly integrated single SADCC economy.

Yet the follow-up actions were devoid of consistency or the determination to pursue real goals and strategies. The absence of clear strategies resulted in episodic, not thought-through actions at the behest of the Head of State, such as the participation in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1998, the explanations of which left more questions than answers not only in Namibia, but also beyond its borders.

(Pan-)Africanism?

The spirit of pan-Africanism derives from the restlessness of black people living in the developed world, but who saw their plight as inextricably tied into the developments around the inhabitants of the African continent.

The later versions of pan-African sentiments still stemmed from international quarters such as the UN General Assembly in its commitment to assisting Africa to participate more meaningfully in international affairs by encouraging the continent to stand together as a political bloc. One such General Assembly resolution was as follows:¹⁸

- Give full support to the political and institution structure of emerging democracies in Africa;
- Encourage and sustain regional and sub-regional mechanisms for preventing conflict and promoting political stability, and to ensure a reliable flow of resources for peace-keeping operations on the continent;
- Take special measures to address the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa, including debt cancellation, improved market access, enhanced official development assistance and increased flows of foreign direct investment as well as transfers of technology, and
- Help Africa build up its capacity to tackle the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other infectious diseases.

17 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004:64).

18 (ibid.:v).

In many ways, Namibia sold itself short in terms of the great strides this small country had taken to solidify its Africanness. For instance, it has been much more pro-Africa than South Africa and Angola, its rich neighbours. It is only in Namibia that the state promoted the singing of the African Union Anthem alongside the national anthem.

Namibia's lost opportunities in effecting and directing a pan-Africanist agenda are not due to a lack of interest but mainly to a lack of consistency and intellectual cohesion. For instance, if Namibia had been as consistent about promoting a pan-Africanist agenda as it had been over the singing of the African Union Anthem, the political leadership would have made attempts to enhance its intellectual capacity by employing non-Namibian scholars and thinkers in its advisory networks. How else would one country push a continental agenda without the direct input of other Africans, at least at an ideas level?

This is what Kwame Nkrumah did when he employed other Africans in his team to advise him. Indeed, he even went as far as importing the African-American pan-Africanist Dr WEB du Bois – the Father of pan-Africanism – who died in Ghana. Similarly, Julius Nyerere encouraged scholars from the African diaspora, such as Walter Rodney, to go and work in Tanzania, while Kenneth Kaunda made Zambia home for exiled Namibians and South Africans for a long period. In this manner, these leaders gave effect to what they preached. This was never the case in Namibia.

Secondly, the country has done itself a great disservice with its practice of anti-intellectualism by which it emphasised blind loyalty to the ruling SWAPO Party of Namibia, instead of embracing Namibians on the basis of the contribution they could make to the life of the nation. This anti-intellectualism deprived the country's diplomatic services of new ideas and thoughts.

Thirdly, before South Africa became liberated with Nelson Mandela at its helm, Africa looked to Namibia for a new mode of African leadership – an occasion to which Namibia never rose.

Pan-Africanism, as a concept, has its historical roots in the protest movement of North American and West Indian 'Negroes' who were reasserting their links with Africa and the achievements of African civilisations. Its precursors were the early 'Back to Africa' movements, following on the creation of countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone, as locations for 'freed' slaves who were returned to the African continent to live as free people. One of the high points of this remarkable spread of blackism was the work of Marcus Aurelius Garvey who, in the 1920s in the United States, championed what later became known as *Pan-Africanism*.¹⁹

19 Legum (1962:24–36).

When the UN was founded in 1946, as the world was licking the wounds from the Second European Tribal War (often described as the Second World War), Africa was almost entirely under European colonial rule. Only four countries were self-ruling, namely Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and the Union of South Africa.

Pan-Africanism was, to all intents and purposes, an —²⁰

... expression of resistance by people whose present day reality is the direct consequence of a history of slavery. From the ghettos of New York or Detroit to the rural communities of the Caribbean, individuals and groups have turned their gaze towards Africa as their true homeland, as the place to which they truly belong

Colin Legum,²¹ in his book entitled *Pan-Africanism*, gives a relatively full account of this trajectory. Among these personalities who agitated in America for the return of dignity to the people of African ancestry were Prince Hall (1735–1807), a minister of a church in Boston and a Freemason Grand Master. In 1787, Hall petitioned the Massachusetts Legislative Assembly to allow impoverished black people to return to their African homelands. The request was ignored. Paul Cuffe (1759–1817), a Quaker merchant and shipbuilder from Boston, urged fellow Africans to return to Africa. In 1815, in concert with another 40 fellow African Americans, he set sail for Sierra Leone in a ship he had built himself. His efforts did not amount to more than establishing a settlement in West Africa at his own costs. The efforts by children of ex-slaves to emancipate themselves as Africans were followed by those of white American liberals who founded the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816 with the main aim of financing and arranging for the relocation of ‘freed’ slaves to Liberia. One of the outcomes was the American Colonial Society’s establishment of Liberia, the first American colony in Africa, which became home to repatriated ‘freed’ African slaves.

The same spirit of agitation to return to Africa obtained in the West Indian Islands and Latin America where Africans were slaves. For instance, the Jamaican journalist John Russwurm (1799–1857) picked up the freedom mantle there, and supported the repatriation of Africans. He later moved to Liberia where he set up the *Liberia Herald* newspaper. In 1897, Dr Albert Throne launched the African Colonial Enterprise, with the aim of relocating Africans in the West Indies to Africa.²²

Later, following the spread of the theory of the “survival of the fittest” by the European thinker Charles Darwin (1809–1882), practitioners of white supremacy extended the theory of Social Darwinism to argue that Africans and other people of colour in the world were in the lowest ranks of the human pecking order and were, therefore, only fit to be ruled by white Caucasians, who were claimed to be superior to them. Thus, colonisation

20 Watson & Thompson (2000:10).

21 Legum (1962:13–64).

22 (ibid.).

was justified and expanded under the pretext that white settlers in Africa were culturally superior to those to whom they had the duty to deliver civilisation by way of their own (European) religious, political and economic systems. Once they had brought this 'civilisation' to the 'heathens', 'savages' and 'barbarians', they were the harbingers of the good life. Hence, as late as 1919/20, with the Treaty of Versailles, Article 22 of the Treaty of the League of Nations argued that, with respect to the inhabitants of "C" mandate countries such as Namibia, they "were not able to stand by themselves ... or unable to manage their own affairs" and, therefore, were obliged to be governed by and placed under the tutelage of 'advanced' nations such as the white South Africans.²³ This ruling could and did, in fact, apply to Africans as a whole.

The UN became a forum where colonies ruled by other nations could agitate for self-rule under the umbrella of the right to self-determination. After the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by UN member states on 10 December 1948, it became increasingly difficult for colonisers to maintain possession of their colonies and still remain respectable members of the UN.

In this context, African countries would find the pan-African route the best treatment to undo what Chika Onyeani, in his seminal work entitled *Capitalist Nigger*, describes as follows:²⁴

The balkanization of Africa by the six Caucasian nations, Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Germany, resulted in the creation of disparate and at best, baseless boundaries, countries without geographic significance. The fight to gain independence was not so much aggressive pursuit of the goal of independence by African leaders, as the realization by the Europeans that they had looted all that they needed to loot from Africa. The leaders of Africa who benefited from the handout of independence to African countries had no concept of the ideals of rulership they were inheriting other than their desire to displace the Europeans in their oppression of masses of the people and their opulent lifestyles with the resources of the people.

In the end, pan-Africanism is in every African country's national interest!

Negotiated (peaceful) resolution of conflict

Namibia deserves credit for the dexterity with which its leaders managed to reach common ground before, during, and after the hard negotiations in the Constituent Assembly, which agreed upon and crafted the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia at the end of 1989 – within 80 days. Admittedly, the conditions in the international community and under which the Constitution was negotiated were more favourable than those which prevailed when previous African constitutions were written. What must be said, however, is that the Namibian leadership from all political party formations seized

23 Goldblatt (1978:211).

24 Onyeani (1999:98).

the moment and put together a peace initiative which provided the blanket of security and stability under which the Namibian nation has been able to sleep since Independence. It took the leadership that was in place to deliver such a magnanimous testament to the coming generations.

What followed later in terms of telling the Namibian story to the international community in general and to Africa in particular is far below the standards of the Namibian success story. The Namibian leadership sold the country short by returning to the failed antics of African politics, whereby leaders in the ruling party degenerated into the psychosis of African ruling party hubris and paranoia. The same leadership that had ushered in political liberation in such an exemplary fashion by negotiating a peaceful settlement with their worst enemies retrogressed by ten steps in introducing a one-party-political style of rule by fear to such a degree that the country lost its respectability in the region and on the continent. Sam Nujoma, who presided over Namibia's independence, is not one of the elder statesmen called upon to mediate in any resolution on the continent because he is not regarded as a man of sufficient peace or wisdom to counsel others. In his latter years as a leader, he became belligerent and punitive towards his own who did not wish for him to stay permanently in power as the Perfect Man, the Strong Man of the land.

National reconciliation

Namibia's policy on national reconciliation is not an outcome, as was the case in South Africa, of a Sunset Clause²⁵ employed to cajole the white population into accepting changes so that that they would not leave the country or destabilise it. In Namibia's case, the SWAPO leadership decided that, if it came to power, reconciliation with their historical political foes would be the route to follow. In February 1989, at a party meeting in Angola, the SWAPO leadership adopted the following resolution on national reconciliation:²⁶

The Central Committee resolved to adopt a policy of national reconciliation in order to enhance the chances of peace in Namibia ... Communities have been set against each other, tribe against tribe, race against race, wife against husband, son against father, daughter against mother, etc. The Swapo policy of national reconciliation was aimed therefore to heal these wounds of war ...

While it is very important to give credit to the SWAPO leadership for this bold and magnanimous resolution, the point must be made that there have been very few efforts on

25 The Sunset Clause, developed by Joe Slovo as a guide for the African National Congress (ANC) strategy to negotiate with the white apartheid establishment, recommended that a Government of National Unity be adopted until the white citizens adapted to it. In five years (when the sun set), it would then take over all apparatuses of state and government. See Slovo (1992:36–40).

26 *Forum for the Future News*, No. 2, June 2004, p 2.

SWAPO's part to follow it up in a nation-building programme. There was considerable gesturing on the part of some quarters of the government towards appeasing white farmers and businesses when it was convenient for it to do so. However, virtually nothing was done to heal the wounds that were inflicted in areas of jurisdiction where SWAPO was in charge, for example, in Lubango in Angola, where many people who were perceived by the leadership to be difficult were tortured, made to disappear, or reported to have died of some or other obscure illness.²⁷

Where Namibia did not do so well was in internalising reconciliation as a value for Namibian society. Because the government did not build on this foundation, it has now crumbled. Furthermore, the ruling party has adopted a stance that it is more important than the people. Moreover, the first President has resorted to calling white people who have an opinion that differs from his or his party's "foreigners" who are there at the mercy of the ruling party. Hence, the ruling party has been unable to distinguish between itself, the government, and the state – so much so that the party leaders have begun to fantasise that the party is above the government and above the state. In this manner, Namibia cannot be a promoter of positive pan-Africanism.

Internationalism

The expression of nationalism, in tandem with the logic of states and boundaries left behind by European colonialism, understandable though it has been, must be seen to be an artificial situation stemming from one of the main aims of colonialism: to divide and rule African territories. The long history of this experience and the exploitation of Africa that accompanied it left African countries individually and collectively underdeveloped. Liberation can only come through informed and collective action and forward-looking programmes that start in individual African states.

It is futile for any African country to harbour the illusion that it can develop meaningfully in a sustainable fashion in the present world by itself. Only through partnership and commercial and economic solidarity can Africa become a real player on the continent and in the world. Tajudeen Abdul Rahman expressively observes this as follows:²⁸

The collective African experience is that we can only be ourselves and we need each other to counter the threat of marginalization, rapacious globalization and the consolidation of whatever little gains may have been accomplished in a number of African countries. No one country can be a sustainable miracle if its neighbours are in hell.

27 SWAPO Party of Namibia (1996). This book, produced by the party in response to the calls to the SWAPO leadership to give an explanation for what happened to countless Namibians in the so-called dungeons in Lubango, Angola, representing over 80% of the unaccounted-for deaths or disappearances of people under SWAPO's jurisdiction, offers "died in combat" as the main cause of the absence of people.

28 Tajudeen Abdul Rahman, cited by Murithi (2005:8–9).

It is not sufficient to think of pan-Africanism only in terms of the contribution which other African governments have made to the struggle for Namibia's independence. For instance, being sandwiched between two giant economies, Angola and South Africa, offers Namibia great pan-African possibilities. Namibia could have brought about a new format of dialogue between these countries, not only for trade and commercial reasons, but also to enhance and harmonise the disparate cultural and other ties that exist between the citizens of those countries. Namibia could benefit a great deal from this harmonisation, in the process rendering trade and commercial interaction more integrated and sustainable. In so doing, the consolidation of peace and democracy could become people-oriented and less focused on mere government interactions, necessary though they are.

Race relations

Against the background of apartheid and the worse circumstances that obtained in Namibia before Independence, Namibia has to be commended as having done extremely well in the area of race relations. To be sure, these were militarised under apartheid, as the SWAPO Central Committee statement in February 1989 succinctly noted.²⁹ There was hardly a family in Namibia that did not have a member working for the South African Defence Force, whose aim was to prevent the coming into being of true black majority rule in the country.

Jannie de Wet, the erstwhile Commissioner General of the Indigenous Peoples of South West Africa, the prefect of white minority rule in the country, acknowledged his astonishment at the manner in which the SWAPO-led Government had handled and maintained peaceful race relations in the country. Addressing a packed gala dinner bidding farewell to the first President and welcoming the second on 20 March 2005, De Wet expressed his gratitude to the Namibian Government that he had never in his previous role thought that he would live in a free Namibia where he would be respected as a white citizen amongst black citizens of the country, and how this was all due to the policy of reconciliation that recognised all races as equal citizens.³⁰

Across the board, the Namibian people have been more than willing to work together. For the first 15 years after Independence, race relations were beyond reproach until the first President failed to secure the presidency for the fourth time and forever. He then turned to Zimbabwe and made use of unnecessary venom to reassert his leadership in his party. He became hostile towards white citizens, and party politics became worse since any critical voice from the white community was now seen as racist, reactionary, and even imperialist. This is the image that the rest of Africa and the rest of the world now have of Namibia.

29 *Forum for the Future News*, Newsletter No. 2, June 2004, p 2.

30 JM de Wet, speech at the gala dinner in honour of President-Elect Hifikepunye Lucas Pohamba, Windhoek, 20 March 2005.

This is disappointing, compared with Nkrumah's truly pan-Africanist stance in 1957, when he declared that all Africans could enter Ghana without visas, including white South Africans, as they were citizens of the African continent!

Corruption

Corruption has been a silent destroyer of confidence in the Namibian body politic. Though it remains hard to pinpoint particular incidents of official corruption, the problem is so rampant that the second President pronounced his own commitment to stamping it out in his first address as Head of State on 21 March 2005. The background to his acknowledgement that corruption was a cancer in Namibian society was, in part, the lack of action by the state on a number of investigations instigated by the government but with no outcome. A total of over 14 Presidential Commissions were appointed by the Nujoma-led Government to investigate incidents of corruption, but none of their outcomes were announced or followed up on – all due to political interference and influence.³¹

The land question

From 25 June to 1 July 1991, the Namibian Government convened a National Conference on Land Reform and the Land Question. This involved discussing the 'willing seller

31 The list includes the following: Presidential Commission on Higher Education, 1991; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Chiefs, Headmen and Other Traditional or Tribal Leaders and Authorities, 1991; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Alleged instances of Irregularities in Respect of Property of the Central Government of Namibia, 1991; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Procedures and Practices Applied in the Allocation and Utilisation of Existing Fishing Rights, 1993; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Cause of Resistance by Certain Members of the Caprivi Community to the Appointment of Certain Senior Public Servants (Education), 1993; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Labour-related Matters Affecting Agricultural Employees and Domestic Employees, 1995; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Legislation for the More Effective Combating of Crime in Namibia, 1996; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Aviation Regulatory Practices of the Directorate Civil Aviation in the Ministry of Works, Transport and Communication, 1997; Presidential Commission of Inquiry on Education, Culture and Training, 1999; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Activities, Management and Operations of TransNamib Holdings Limited, 2001; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Activities, Management and Operations of Air Namibia, 2001; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Activities, Affairs, Management and Operations of the Social Security Commission, 2002; Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Activities, Affairs, Management and Operations of the Roads Authority and Road Fund Administration, 2003; and Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Activities, Affairs, Management and Operation of the Former Amalgamated Commercial Holding (Pty) Ltd AMCOM Registration No. 93/261 and the Former Development Brigade Corporation (DBC) Established under Section 2 of the Development Brigade Corporation Act, 1992, (Act No. 32 of 1992), 2004. Until the Anti-corruption Commission was appointed in 2004/5, no outcomes of these Commissions were announced or acted upon.

– willing buyer’ principle, and was aimed at promoting the constitutional right of all citizens to own, purchase or sell land anywhere in the country.³²

Other than the ongoing expressions of discontent from the Herero community, there has not been any major incident regarding the use of land in the country since Independence. The government has acquitted itself well in allowing the Constitution to run its course in land affairs, and would do well to maintain the stance of a unitary state with some allowance for the use of land by and under Traditional Authorities.

The only point that ought to be made is that the government has been inconsistent in regard to land matters when dealing with the Zimbabwean crisis over the years. Namibia did not need to denounce President Mugabe *ad hominem*, but merely, in line with its own Supreme Law, say to him that the grabbing of land from white Zimbabweans was incompatible with the laws of Namibia and SADC. The good name of Africa cannot be sustained when member states behave so wilfully towards their citizens’ rights to land.

Challenges ahead

It must be stated that pan-Africanism as a grand idea was never coherent in any country in Africa since its inception. Its coherence was within the diaspora where it started – within the ranks of black people who found themselves away from the Mother Continent and hankered to be connected to the where their ancestors came from. When the matter of the unity of Africa was debated amongst the leaders of liberated states, there was a big division between those who wanted the unity now, and those who preferred it to be the outcome of a gradual process. Hence, the formation of the OAU was a compromise between the so-called Monrovia Group who wanted a gradual process, and the Casablanca Group who were the radical pan-Africanists at the time.

At the centre of this vexing debate was the question of who was going to be the Leader of leaders. Nkrumah pushed hard for the immediate unification of Africa, a zeal that can be said to have led to his demise in his country, Ghana. In other words, even though there has never been national coherence about pan-Africanism as an ideal, there has, at the same time, been more consensus about the need to have a pan-African identity than there has been about forming the United States of Africa.

There seems to be a consensus amongst Africanists that the better route to pan-Africanism – or even the United States of Africa, as the embodiment of this ideal – is through the gradual route of regionalism. The major challenge here is whether political leaders of

32 Article 16(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia pronounces that “[a]ll persons shall have the right in any part of Namibia to acquire, own and dispose of all forms of immovable and movable property individually or in association with others and to bequeath their property to their heirs or legatees ...”.

Africa can master enough authority on the one hand, and political will on the other, to mobilise the disparate nation-state-based identities to move towards a united front of Africa à la Nkrumah, with, inter alia, a single African currency, one African defence command, and one mega-constellation of African states. As long as African identities remain patterned along European linguistic blocs, namely anglophone, francophone and lusophone, pan-Africanism remains an ideal that is difficult to reach. In addition, nationalism and national pride stand starkly in the way of each state in Africa's attempts towards realising true pan-Africanism – and Namibia is no exception. Xenophobia exists in each African state even as national leaders pay lip service, at best, to pan-Africanism.

If pan-Africanism was a search for the dignity of African peoples in the 20th century, can it still remain such a quest in the 21st, in the contexts of nationalisms, sovereignties and 'independentisms' across the African continent that hinder the slightest continental efforts to settle problems of democratisation, namely the rights of the citizens of African countries to be themselves – free from dictatorships, free from oppression, free from ignorance, and free from want? It would appear that pan-Africanism in the current century means different things to various players at different times, admittedly for varying purposes. The clearest acclamation to have come from African states in relation to the commitment to pan-Africanism was the establishment of the Pan-African Parliament in March 2004, by Article 17 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, as one of the nine Organs provided for in the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community signed in Abuja, Nigeria, in 1991. The Pan-African Parliament purports to provide a common platform for African peoples and their grass-roots organisations to participate more in decision-making processes regarding problems and challenges facing their countries in particular, and the continent in general.

The existence of such a Pan-African Parliament in Midrand, South Africa, is one of the hallmarks of contradictions in African politics. Many of the members of this megaparliament either hold dubious credentials as elected officials, or hail from regimes that have no serious parliamentary democracy back home. How they would oversee parliamentary democracy on the continent when they have no such culture is anybody's guess. The members of this parliament are undoubtedly grateful to stay in South Africa where they enjoy so many benefits and trappings – most of these at the expense of South African taxpayers!

Namibia is a member of this Pan-African Parliament, yet refuses to be part of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which is widely considered as the jewel in the crown of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). NEPAD was adopted by the African Union (AU) Summit in Lusaka in 2001 as its official development programme and is considered as a pan-African agenda programme.

The APRM was subsequently launched in 2003 and is regarded by member states as the most important NEPAD instrument and, as such, a critical AU instrument intended

to assist African governments with enhancing the quality of governance on the African continent by allowing member states, as peers, to review one another, after acceding to the process on a voluntary basis. The APRM was adopted at NEPAD's Sixth Summit of the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee in Abuja, Nigeria, in March 2003. The instrument would, if respected, truly assist African governments with monitoring themselves in anticipation of the peer review process so that, in the end, democratic practices would be shared and strengthened across the continent. This would be true pan-Africanism in motion.

It is not surprising that Namibia is not one of the signatories to the APRM. When confronted with the idea of respecting the commitments to good governance and the process of peer review in NEPAD, Namibia has exhibited a dismissive attitude towards these AU efforts, arguing that NEPAD was purely concerned with economic issues (a fundraising arm of the AU for African countries) and not with politics. Namibia's second Prime Minister, Theo-Ben Gurirab, was vocal on the APRM issue, saying it belonged —³³

... to the dustbin of history as a sham. I see it as a misleading new name for the old, discredited structural adjustment fiasco. ... Neo-colonialism – which is what the APRM is – is a killer disease: we must run away from it.

Conclusion

Like the European Renaissance that focused on Europe, pan-Africanism was an intellectual preoccupation of individuals who were concerned about the future of the African continent and her inhabitants in the context of what had been inflicted on them by other nations. The trouble in Africa was that many concepts, including that of the African Renaissance advocated by Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, held that African leaders – or, rather, the ruling politicians – were the high priests of ideas. In Namibia, where there is a total disdain for intellectual thought and contribution, pan-Africanism as such could not thrive, as there was no beginning, no process and no ending to it. Whatever there was or is of Pan-Africanism in Namibia originated from Sam Nujoma and the disparate histories of SWAPO.

Attempts under the rubric of the Pan-Afrikan Centre of Namibia (Pacon), established in 1999, are instructive. Its best intentions to revive Africanism in Namibia notwithstanding, it fell prey to the politics of heroism, becoming a mini-cultural mouthpiece of the ruling party to such a degree that its biggest accomplishment is the unsuccessful movie, *Where others wavered*, on the founding President. Thus, Pacon failed to become a pan-Africanist movement, and instead became an ethnic entity with the central preoccupation of winning the favours of the ruling party.

33 Gurirab (2003); cited in Melber (2003:22). In this paper, Melber offers a helpful analysis of the contradictions of liberation movements in power, inter alia alluding to the fact that they do not necessarily breed a democratic culture.

Pan-Africanism is, in essence, a beckoning of Africans – and yes, including Namibians – to turn to themselves, to Africa. For too long, Africans have been programmed to start elsewhere, and end up elsewhere – and hardly ever with themselves. Namibian problems and opportunities are African in content and character; therefore, thinking about solutions to the problems of the country must start with Africa, working with and through other Africans, using Africa as the starting point of development and planning – in order to arrive at African solutions. As the late Tom Mboya, a Kenyan nationalist during the struggle for liberation in his country, once opined at the time of the pro-West/pro-East divide, “Africans are neither pro-West nor pro-Russian – they are pro-African!”³⁴

Namibia cannot succeed in going the route of pan-Africanism by itself: its economy is too small and leaders with very limited influence. For that matter, no single African country can drag the rest towards a united front, however willing or resourceful the others might be. Former Tanzanian President. Benjamin Mkapa perhaps has his finger on the right button when he makes the following warning:³⁵

This is a shortcoming of both regional and continental organizations. The NEPAD momentum is slowing down. The Summits have descended into annual parades. Implementation of past decisions is inadequately reviewed. New development initiatives are not sufficiently backed by funding, and so become simple resolutions of hope. Our actions do not match the ambitions we proclaim. Churning out position papers will not fight poverty, illiteracy and disease. Analysis of our problems must happen concurrently with deliberate capacity to address them ...

And finally, May 2013 marked the 50-year anniversary of not so much the accomplishments as such towards the African Union agenda aspired to in 1963 with the establishment of the OAU, but a new call to action to the new crop of African leaders to dream afresh. This dream might not be about the sovereignty of African states but a new African Renaissance. This spirit should deconstruct the current state of affairs of the AU, which by and large is about the goings-on of a trade union of African heads of state – not the emancipation of the dwellers of the African continent who are in search of a better life. Thabo Mbeki's poignant question cannot be overemphasised:³⁶

... what have we done over half-a-century to advance towards the achievement of the objective of African unity[?]

This is where it is at: not the fight against colonialism, but the march towards the emancipation of Africa, including the lifting up of the burden of heads of state as ‘Big Men’.

34 Legum (1962:13).

35 Mkapa (2011).

36 Mbeki (2013).

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