



Embassy
of the Federal Republic of Germany
Windhoek



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

Public lecture

The German Unification and its impact on Africa and Namibia

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**4th November 2010
Windhoek, Namibia**

Thank you all very much of you for coming to participate in this conversation. This is really not the kind of public lecture that professors give when they come with all the knowledge and everybody is expected to commit their own words to paper and remember them. That is not the purpose today. The purpose today is to celebrate the long road that we have travelled together over the years with intermittently very difficult challenges.

I was struck this morning when I was reading the book that we have launched just last week, in which a contribution was made by Mr. Dirk Mudge where he writes about his personal experiences with politics in Namibia. He says in 1973 the United Nations sent a special representative to Namibia on a facts finding mission. That was Dr. Alfred Escher a Swiss, who was accompanied by Mr. Jacob Chacco from India, and Macaire Pedanou from Togo. Mr. Mudge was taking these distinguished diplomats to Ovamboland at the time and Kavango. They encountered challenges that he was not aware of at the time as a white Namibian. They could not check in as a group in any of the hotels in Namibia because they had an Indian and an African in the delegation. Mr. Mudge concludes that this is when he came to face the reality of racism that was in 1973.

When you go back and try to imagine what happened when the first European colonialists came here to Africa and met Africans who did not have full clothes on their bodies, you can appreciate the level of ignorance which translated into fear, misunderstanding, miscommunication, mistrust, and misjudgment. You can appreciate that perhaps some of the things that our uninvited guests did were not out of malice but out of pure lack of knowledge. I happen to be one of the Namibians, still alive, who remain grateful for the Germans who came here. I am not about to question their motives, they are dead. Their coming here produced some of us in the manner that we can understand the world better today.

Something happened this month exactly 176 years ago and that was a very big meeting in Berlin. Some journals would refer to this conference as a Congo Conference or West Africa conference. This assemblage brought together all the major powers in Europe with one central preoccupation, namely to decide the future of the African continent and not so much the future of the African people. They wanted to recreate the African continent into their own image; they came with pen and paper, debating amongst themselves: "you over there, what do you get? I get this and you get that." And Germany claimed what became German South West Africa, now known as Namibia. Germany also got German East Africa, that's Tanzania and two West African nations - Togo and Cameroon.

There was not one African invited to the conference about the future of Africa. The conference went on from November to January, that must have been a very big discussion, and they must have been committed to solving the problem of darkness on the African Continent.

Historians now tell us that there were important forces that moved the Europeans at the time, to do what they did to render us what we are today. That was commerce: how they were going to trade and with that came the understanding of how to organize, reorganize, and reconfigure their perceived spheres of influence. Native people were asked to show them particular places, and the natives would walk them there and upon arrival the Europeans would start writing that they have just discovered the places they were taken to and named the places in the manner that they deemed fit. That is how we acquired our names. Africa was an important terrain where they would exercise their own European ways, admittedly at our expense.

I am grateful that we are talking about the unification of Germany today. What we saw in 1890/ 1891 was not the first effort to unify Germany there was an earlier unification under Otto Von Bismarck in 1871. I wish it was possible to go back and see where Europe was at that time and I would argue that the hearts of these colonialists were not filled with hatred towards the African people. They had a different agenda altogether to expand and to conquer and spread the seeds of Christianity to save us from ourselves.

So Europe decided the fate of Africa. After the first European tribal war, which we are told was World War I, there was an attempt to reorganize the world. And that is when we as Namibia, Botswana, South African and Lesotho in our neighborhood were reconsidered possessions of European potentates around 1918/ 1920. Article 22 of the Treaty of Versailles says that the people of South West Africa were not ready to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world; and therefore they had to be handed over to a more civilized group to guide them on their path towards civilization maturity. The group of civilized people that we were loaned to was the white racists in South Africa. The story is a very deep one. Around 1902 only three or four countries in Africa could claim self governance and therefore 90 % of the land that we know as Africa was under foreign rule.

In our case here in Namibia it was very interesting in 1904 the German Kolonialbund issued a decree with which to govern the natives of this country. It was called Väterliches Züchtigungsrecht, the right of fatherly protection! It decreed that any white person regardless

of age, status, position was obligated to beat, physically assault any black person, at that time any Ovambo person, who was considered by the white person as lazy at work to protect black people from laziness. It was a time when in CDM now NAMDEB was established as a major economic player in this land. At that time black people were not allowed to eat white bread. I don't understand the dietary reasoning for that. They were not allowed to drink alcohol (that I can understand now); they were not allowed to wear watches because they would be too cheeky to know what time it was. They were not allowed to enter the only shopping place in that town. When a black person went to buy a shirt and went to the window where a white lady was in attendance and the white lady asked: 'What do you want?' The black man said "broek" (trousers) and the white lady in the window arbitrarily decided what size, color and quality! That's why when you think back you saw our fathers who were returning from the mines with clothes that didn't fit well and they looked stupid, that was the purpose to make them look unintelligent.

1961 was a very important year for Africa in international relations. That was when Africa became a very central point in the rivalry between what is known as the West and the East at the time. Belgian Congo became free and a very radical and clear-thinking leader, Patrice Lumumba, became the leader after his time in prison. The Belgians who imprisoned him earlier were in attendance when Lumumba addressed the independence ceremony crowds. His inauguration speech wherewith he called upon black Africans to look to the future with pride infuriated them. They informed Washington, London and Paris that there was this native who was talking dangerous things and who needed to be removed fast and Lumumba was killed. The record shows that Belgian Congo, later Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was the beginning of the Cold War in Africa. I have the cables that show that US President John F. Kennedy made Mobutu President of Congo. Kennedy invited Joseph Mobutu, a colonel in the Belgian Congolese to the White House; Mobutu could not believe he was in the White House! When they had finished drinking tea in the White House, President Kennedy said to Mobutu, at the time Joseph Desire Mobutu before he changed his name to Mobutu Sese Seko, Kennedy took his guests for a walk in the Rose Garden. He whispered to him: "We are concerned about Congo and we fear that Communism is marching into Africa. I am told that you are the only person who can help us retain order and law in Congo". Innocent Mobutu said, I am not a leader and Kennedy tells him not to worry about leadership as America would take care of things. The same record reveals that the first president of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah warned Africa not to allow foreign forces to police Congo and that they needed to put their own troops together to look after the people of the continent.

I said that because when you reflect upon the device of the Berlin Wall we have to look back at the damage that was done to Africa in the context of the rivalry between America and the Soviet Union. You know if you read SWAPO records until 1988 you will discover that even Namibian leaders were committed to that form of government. The Constitution of SWAPO 1976 speaks very highly of socialism. If the Berlin Wall had not fallen, Namibia would have gone the way SWAPO wanted to go at the time and make the country Marxist-Leninist.

Let's go back to Angola; Angola we know was a terrible situation. The Portuguese army that impeded freedom in Angola for a very long time came to their senses and overthrew the Portuguese government in 1974 and started to negotiate with the three major forces in Angola towards independence. These were MPLA, UNITA and FNLA. The Africans wanted to find

one another to negotiate. When the United States heard that the Angolans were ready to find one another and move toward peace, the United States were of a different opinion, they did not want peace in Angola, they were not interested in a peaceful solution. If you want to challenge this, find a copy of the book by John Stockwell the only book that I am aware of that was not republished in the United States of America. The Stockwell book "In search of enemies" is the CIA Story in Angola. He argues that the Angolan people did not want this war; the Americans wanted the war in order to destabilize peace in that part of the world.

The point here is that after the Berlin Wall was created after World War II, the world had a problem and Africa had a bigger problem. African leaders did not have the space to determine their own policies as we do have today. They were either pushed this way to America or that way to the Soviet Union. That's why Africa has many people who received their education in the Soviet Union, and when you talk to them they sound totally uneducated, yet they have degrees behind their names! These degrees are from friendly universities in the Soviet Union where, if a revolutionary party sent you there as a cadre, after a few months you were a doctor of veterinary sciences! These qualifications from friendly universities had and still have deadly consequences on development in Africa. Now the Berlin wall collapsed in November 1989, like the ambassador read it to you. For Namibia that was an incredibly important moment in its history. Some of us are convinced that if the Berlin Wall did not come tumbling down, if the Soviet Union did not recoil at the time it did, if there was no Glasnost and Perestroika under Michail Gorbachev, movements such as SWAPO and the ANC would have been destroyed.

I remember I was a journalist reporting for CBS and CNN in 1989, covering the developments around United Nations Resolution 435, when I went to interview leaders at the UN. On one particular day the Soviet representatives in the United Nations told African leaders that they would no longer support the struggle that they were on their own and had to find solutions to their situations. I have it on good authority that when South Africa learned that the Berlin wall was no more, South Africa ran out of defense and excuses to continue the war that was in Namibia and Angola. That became more acute after the South African forces were smashed at Cuito Cuanavale in Angola. Things got difficult even for the invincible South Africa army.

Let me share a story with you about two guys. I got this story from Pik Botha himself. Pik Botha was the longest serving foreign minister at the time. When he told me the story he had no remembrance of being in the national party government, and I am told that he is now a member of the ANC in South Africa. The story is about how they broke the impasse between Cuba and South Africa towards independence for Namibia. Apparently the Cubans and South Africans were in Cairo, Egypt negotiating. They hated each other's guts! Now both Botha and his Cuban counterpart were regular drinkers - they participated in the consumption of the devil's water rather often. So one night they ended up in a secluded bar in the thick of Cairo where people drank and smoked. Pik Botha was sitting in his corner alone, hiding his face behind the glasses, worrying about what to discuss the following day with the Cubans. His Cuban counterpart brother was sitting in the other corner, hidden by the cigar smoke, with the same worry like Botha. They tried to avoid each other but several drinks later freedom arose, so Botha got rid of his inhibitions and strolled to the Cuban. He offered him a drink, which he accepted with glee. And Pik Botha said to the Cuban, "Please let's talk. This war we are in, our boys are dying in Angola and it is becoming difficult for us to sustain it. What would you

want us to do to end this?" And the Cuba said, Man I am so glad you raised this point, we Cubans cannot afford to be sending troops to Angola anymore, we are poor. So they drank more. Then the Cuban said: If you let Namibia get its independence, we shall pull out of Angola immediately. Pik Botha could not believe it.

The following morning, they pretended not to have seen each other at all. They frowned at each other. Then Pik Botha moved at the meeting: "South Africa would like to propose to Cuba that we will let Namibia become independent if Cuba undertakes to withdraw its troops from Angola". So a solution was found. What Nelson Mandela calls the human spirit triumphed over greed and hostility.

When the news broke that the Berlin wall came down, I had a room mate a German-Jewish lady, very quiet, very serious student. I saw the story on television and I knocked on her door and said: "Corinna, did you hear that the Berlin Wall was destroyed by angry people today?" I realized that what I said did not make sense to her, its like telling President Sam Nujoma that oil was discovered in Katutura, it's too nice to hear! I then invited her to come and see on the TV. When she saw people breaking the wall she started to weep, and for about two hours, she was just crying.

If you read "Long Walk to Freedom" by Nelson Mandela you will discover that the first 68 pages or so are devoted to his struggle and he says had he been released before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, he would have joined the Soviet Union because that's where his comrades were. In other words what I am trying to convey here is that the collapse of the Berlin Wall is more than symbolic to the people of Africa, generally and Namibia in particular. I always argue that there is one country in Africa that Germany has very deep emotions about and that's Namibia. They have heard of it, they know it's close to South Africa but they know they have been here.

When I was in the Goethe Institute, I was liked quite a bit by the director of the institute and he would take me to go and play (Weihnachtsmann) Santa Claus to children in the neighborhood and we really enjoyed it. I didn't have to put on anything I looked natural; this kids would come and touch my skin to see if it quickly rubbed off on them. I was not offended by it at all, as it was not their fault. So the Berlin Wall had a great impact not only on Africa but on the international community. You remember John Kennedy went there in 1961 and declared himself "Ich bin eine Berliner - I am a Berliner. Ronald Reagan went there 1987 and repeated three times 'Mr. Gorbachev tear down this wall!' The tearing down of the wall by the inhabitants of Germany, with Germans and other people who were streaming in had deep symbolic significance to all of us in the world. Hence it was called the Iron Curtain; hence it really broke apart one nations that had the same background and the same history. If you were privileged enough to go to the wall while it stood, you would understand why it made such a big story around the world and why its absence means so much to us in Africa. Remember Mandela's word I would have gone to the Soviet Union as that is where my comrades were. I say to you without fear of contradiction that if that wall didn't come down we will not have peace in Namibia, South Africa and many places today. It freed up the space for people to become and be what they always hankered to become and to be but were not allowed because of the Cold War.

I don't think Africans have taken sufficient advantage of the collapse of the Iron Curtain and I don't think Namibians have taken advantage of the new German unification. I argue that if Namibians asked spiritual and intellectual leaders to work with German hearts in the context of Namibia-German history, these two countries would have a much better relationship today. In this sense, Namibia would not send Chief Riruako to go to Germany to discuss this history. He might have the right message but he is the wrong messenger. Chief Riruako goes to Germany and intimidates guilt-trips them with his language: Pay! Pay! You killed the Hereros! It's not even about building sound relationships as we understand relationships. Those of you who have been to Okapuka Resort will remember seeing a bus full of Germans arriving on their Urlaub/holiday or safari in Africa. They are visitors here and they are completely committed to Namibia to make this country work, completely dedicated to make this country have a good name internationally. I argue many times that if we had it right, the Goethe institute that sits in Johannesburg will be here in Windhoek, where Africans who are learning German would encounter and hear German in restaurants and shops. That is how one learns a language faster, by encountering it. There are few people who speak German in Johannesburg and those who do only speak it at home, because they are afraid they will be called this and that. Here it is normal to speak German on the street!

The Berlin wall symbolized division politically, culturally, psychologically and religiously. Now the wall is gone thanks to those who brought it down; Germany is united. Do you know that there are people in Europe who are not happy with a united Germany because they are scared German power can wake up and do funny things again?

Germany, to my little understanding of European affairs, is the strongest economy in the current European Union. Therefore if we want to benefit from the collapse of the wall, we need to allow the collapse of our prejudices in our own hearts, we need to collapse the barriers that have prevented us either from talking openly with one another. We need to collapse self-righteousness on the part of our African leaders.

I say this because I am really convinced that if Resolution 435 did not take place at the time it did, in the manner it did, SWAPO would have been destroyed from within. Things were not working well in the refugee camps; you know that; things were not working well even in Lusaka in the ANC camps and SWAPO camps. Resolution 435 happened just at the time when the Berlin Wall came down. I have it on good authority that Louis Pienaar who was the last South African Administrator General here was influenced by his personal experience with the returned SWAPO leadership. In his first meeting with the leadership, you can understand he was a very worried man, he thought these people whom he grew up knowing as terrorists would be and look scary. That was not the case. He met Sam Nujoma, Theo-Ben Gurirab, Hage Geingob, Nahas Angula, and others! They talked, mingled and had drinks while he observed their behavior. The story goes that two or three of them asked him about where the furniture in his house came from. I am told that that night Louis Pienaar telephoned President F.W. de Klerk and told him that he had nothing to fear about these people; they were just men and women just like themselves!

Let's take what the Ambassador has indicated. When the Constituent Assembly in Windhoek was picked to draft the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, the news came that there was

no longer a Soviet System. Marxism/Leninism as a style that was committed to without understanding was discredited and a crisis prevailed. In moments of a crisis self righteousness goes away and you start to show curiosity about the other person and that's what helped the Constituent Assembly to negotiate the Constitution that we have today. I am grateful that we are talking about this today. It gives us the opportunity to dispel the lie that's being paraded around by some of our national leaders that we defeated colonialism. We didn't defeat anybody. The war came to our end. If you go to Khomasdal you go on the main road there before you turn to Katutura hospital you will hit the street called Hans Dietrich Genscher Street. I haven't seen another name of the five countries in the Contact Group that were representing the UN on Namibia's future. Germany was more committed than the other four because of the presence of Germans here, it was totally understandable. To Hans-Dietrich Genscher the project of Namibia was a personal project as he really wanted to see it work. Let us learn to say thank you when it is necessary, and it does not make us weaker or smaller! It simply makes us better!

In other words, Ladies and Gentlemen, when we stare at the history behind us, we must remember that there were people of good will who made it possible for us to be here today. Many Germans sacrificed for our liberation, many Germans contributed to our freedom, many Germans wished us well. The problem is: do we have the right mechanisms to speak about our history without winners and losers? Other nations in Africa can wish away Germany but we in Namibia cannot. Other nations in Africa can say we don't need Germany but we in Namibia cannot! Many of us now are very German inside, like you will find other Africans who are very Portuguese within and others very French inside. We can ill afford to wish part of our identity away!

We in African universities that speak English constantly have the problem of communicating with other African universities on the African Continent. There are universities that are more French, more Portuguese than African. We are called Anglophone, others Francophone in West Africa, then the Lusophones in Angola, Mozambique, and the former Portuguese islands who believe they are more Portuguese than African. The rest of us are cell phones. The peace dividend from the Berlin wall is the peace dividend that we must enjoy and protect.

If SWAPO came back before 1989 and introduced what was called Marxism-Leninism, where would we be today? When you meet students who come from the United States as peace volunteers and those who come from Germany they have very different outlooks on our life: the Germans youth feel something in their hearts when they are here, whereas American youth feel something with their heads. So let me conclude by really heralding and lifting up the effort among our leaders here who have continued to build this relationship. You would remember that there was a time when a black Namibian lady, African-Namibian lady was sent to Germany as ambassador. She does not have a very directly African name, she is Nora Schimming-Chase. I have it on record that the relationship between Namibia and Germany went rocketing when she was there. Her grandfather was a Schimming: a German! I need not to say more.

What I am trying to say is, we cannot say the Berlin Wall is gone and therefore relationships are no more. We must work on it. We cannot expect everything to come from the Germans in terms of foreign aid and hand outs, we must expect more from us also, and we cannot be

prejudice towards fellow Namibians who are Germans. In case you doubt these Namibia's economy is where it is because of the presence of the white people and many of the Germans. Now you can argue with me on this and I am inviting you to argue with me at your own panel.

There's a professor from Cameroon who is currently at the University of the Witwatersrand--one of the four premier philosophers Africa produced. His name is Achille Joseph Mbembe, who is in the league of Valentin Y. Mudimbe, Paulin Hountondji and Cheikh Anta Diop. Achille Mbembe argues that part of the dilemma of African States is that they are in a big rush to get rid of the white people upon the attainment of political independence, and development goes down. He makes a case that where white people were allowed to stay as part of the furniture in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and until recently Zimbabwe, development went further. Hence Julius Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania, cautioned South Africa's Nelson Mandela: "Now that you are free, don't make the mistake that we made. We were racists and we got rid of the white people who could have brought us development; don't look at people's colour, look at the contributions that they bring." That, my friends is the advice Nyerere offered to Mandela in September 1994. Do you wonder therefore that when Mandela received that advice his behavior was informed by a sense of and commitment to humanity? To Mandela the project of making people feel human was fundamental! Treat everybody as you wish yourself to be treated.

The Germans also have a problem in that they often only see only the negative things in Africans and they do not appreciate the good things that black people generally bring to our common humanity. In failing to recognize the positive, they become provocative in their conduct towards black people. We have come this far by faith, by building relationships and by a commitment to the common good. There are Germans in Namibia who have no desire to go back to Germany. Who are they now? They are Africans! In fact they have done much more for Namibia than I would have done in all of my life. Who is to be thanked for being there to be counted on? Let us be serious now! Who is and who has been there preparing a better life for my child in this country? It's no longer about race my friends, it is about what you and I bring, it is about what we bring to help one another get pulled up. The Berlin Wall was just a symbol of trouble and later a symbol of the release of our human spirit to triumph once more. We are happy that we can talk like this. I need to tell you a story before I sit down. Three years ago I came here, walked around the city, and I noticed two people sitting and talking at Central Café. One was black and the other white, both were men. I went over to Cafe Schneider and when I walked back, they were still talking, I got curious, and because where I live in South Africa they would be plotting something. So I sat down to hear what they were talking about. I got more curious when I heard that their entire conversation was in German. I then discovered that these two old men were Namibians who have known each other for a very long time; one is Herero the other German. I was so honored and humbled by this experience. There is nothing that can make your heart warmer than to find people looking so unlike each other yet possessing a companionship built on enduring memories of friendship and love. We have it better in Namibia my friends, than in South Africa when it comes to matters of race relations. And this is not a small achievement given our bedeviled history. We cannot afford to squander the good will that exists here.

When we talk of the Berlin Wall coming down and celebrate the German Unification, we must appreciate that in our hearts the walls must come down as well. Therefore we have an obligation to turn to one another because there are no more walls to justify our separation; we have to listen to one another because there are no more walls to prevent the good will to grow between us. We need to be curious about one another because there are no more walls to prevent us from seeing and feeling the pain of the others and from participating in the joy of the other person. So Africa has benefited from the collapse of the Berlin Wall but that's not the end of it when you get an education you don't walk around with your certificate showing people I am qualified, you do something with it to show people that your learnedness can bring about improvement in their lives, not only yours.

Thank you.