

SWAPO party golden jubilee: a strategic-transformational-mass party

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I read a certain D. Aluteni's article that appeared in the Namibian of 26 February and the weekly column of Hengari in the same paper, with the latter talking about 'the fault-lines in the ruling party which ought to have induced a critical questioning and introspection for a pluralistic institutional transformation of the party' while the former was talking about 'a radical transformation of the party' from what the author termed 'the center-right party within the framework of the right-wing economic policies to a genuine and unifying left-wing formation to address the fundamental questions of the working class... instead of the symbolism of superficial window-dressing of national reconciliation and economic compromises'.

Hengari in May the 22 last year, again said "there are moments when organizations have to benefit from political crises or random events in order to effect a new frame of reference. The case in point: the internal crisis within SWAPO in 2003 around succession, which led to the ultimate formation of the RDP in 2007, was an opportunity for the ruling party to rethink the politics of contradictory debates, and succession in particular... instead the ruling party didn't turn that crises into opportunity nor the formation of the RDP... used as a vehicle for introspection... There are liberation movements, which failed their transformation in the post-colonial set-up, and the consequence has been their decline and ultimate collapse... SWAPO by its very nature has been a broad ensemble without any ideological out-look in a post-independence Namibia" It is so? How accurate are these analyses?

We should beware of oversimplistic analyses and guard against emotional rhetoric. We owe it to ourselves to examine new ideas and proposals with a critical and suspicious eye and avoid the temptation to leap onto passing bandwagons and applaud too readily that which claims to be new. In fact, many so called new ideas who claim to be revolutionary and authentic are nothing but old ideas in new clothing and that which is genuinely new is not necessar-

ily better than that which is old. The virtues of authenticity should not blind us to the value of that which is universal nor should we readily assume that older practices cannot be authentic.

SWAPO Party initially started with the politics of resistance emerging out of concrete historical contexts of the migrant labour and the defiance campaign with the core objectives derived from pan-africanism. Then there was the Odendaal commission congruent with the apartheid state's official policy of ethnic Particularism and spatial social engineering with Bantu education underpinning the hegemony of the apartheid state (Cohen 1994).

The colonization of Namibia had several subtle and nuanced dimensions, it coalesced around a few core themes such as growing resistance; the militarization of politics with the launching of the armed liberation struggle; In the late 60s and the early 70s, SWAPO had a consultative conference that drafted a new constitution that laid out its criteria for membership and its aims and objectives; then followed the 72 workers' strike; the intensification of the liberation struggle in the mid 70s with the mass exodus of youngsters and the independence of Angola; the emergence of a framework for transition to independence with the acceptance of resolution 435 in 78 and the subsequent Cassinga massacre intended to derail the peace process; the puppet interim government in 79 and the second-tier authorities in 80 as alternatives to SWAPO; the 82 constitutional principles; the transitional government in 85 with CIA cold war logic giving bursaries to our people through non-governmental organizations to supposedly block the Namibians in exile with their 'communist ideology', no wonder the intermittent ideological scuffles sometimes; the successive military campaign and the intensification of the war by the combined forces of the Cuban 'Internationalist' forces, Angola's FAPLA and PLAN as SWAPO military wing until the decisive battle of Quito Cuanavale in Angola that saw the combined forces of Unita, the SWATF, and SADF under the guidance of the American and British intelligence thoroughly defeated, and forced to the negotiating table and the eventual triumphal withdrawal of Cuban troops due to the Reagan's policy of 'linkage' and finally the UN supervised elections in 89 and independence and the birth of a nation in 90.

After independence, SWAPO as a liberation movement reinvented itself into a formidable vanguard party and effective machinery that won all



SWAPO Party remains the most popular political party in Namibia. Even if all political parties combine, SWAPO Party will still defeat them.

the election campaigns. Minister Nandi-Ndeitwa, this week said the first decade of independence was characterized by prosperity, peace and stability, international solidarity and high expectations but the second decade saw some political upheaval with splinter parties such as COD, NUDO, APP, RP and RDP which calls for an analysis. The question is; is SWAPO a cadre party, a cartel party, a catch-all party, or a mass party? Let us look at the library research to answer that question.

The concept of "political party" has long been the source of intensive conceptual as well as empirical wrangling within political science, having been defined and redefined over the decades in a wide variety of ways. Jennifer K. Smith UW-Milwaukee presented a paper on the Concept of "Political Party" in Comparative Perspective and his paper reframes this debate in terms of a distinction between "ontological" and "taxonomic" conceptualizations of party.

Not all of the scholars who have written classic treatments of political parties have considered it necessary to define their principal term. Duverger (1959); Michels (1966); and Weber (1978: 284-5) don't define the terms. Other writers, however, have sought to define party as "a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they all agreed" (as quoted by Pomper 1992: 2). Burke's definition, as others have noted, is normative as well as descriptive: it circumscribes the essence of party by indicating not only what it is but also what it ought to be. Crotty says (1970: 294, as quoted in Sartori 1976: 68)... A political party is a formally organized group that performs the functions of educating the public... that recruits and promotes individuals for public office, and that provides a comprehensive linkage function between the public and governmental decision-makers.

It is distinguished from other groups by its dedication to influencing policy making on a broad scale, preferably by controlling government and by its acceptance of institutionalized rules of electoral conduct.

These definitions are normative in the sense that they not only define parties in a particular way but assign to them certain functions which the parties are obliged to fulfill. Broadly speaking, each of these definitions can also be regarded as "maximalist". It is in this sense that this approach to conceptualizing party is characterized as ontological: it aims to understand party by identifying its essential elements.

Thinking about parties taxonomically entails thinking about them according to type. Such classifications of parties often seem to occur in threes: the familiar distinction between cadre parties, mass parties, and catch-all parties, for example, or between parties that are principally oriented to the search of policy, office, or votes (e.g. Strøm 1990). Steven B. Wolinetz defines one party as a skeletal organization, intermittently active until election; that is a cadre or elite-centered party and the other operating at levels, with offices, regular meetings and a program, which is a mass party seeking to integrate the excluded social groups into the body politic for a radical redistribution of socio-economical and political power. Panebianco (1988) talks about the electoral professional party while Poguntke (1987, 1993), Katz and Mair (1995) talk about the cartel party defined by its relationship with the state as their agents and not brokers between civil society and the state and more recently, Hopkin and Paolucci (1999) talk about the business firm party based on clientelismo of patronage.

More recent variants have come from areas like rational choice. Aldrich (1995), for example, answers the why-ques-

tion in terms of three problems to which parties represent a desirable solution from the perspective of the politicians who create them: the problem of social choice, and the problem of collective action or mobilizing voters. Internal divisions within parties are worth attending to because of conflict as well as because consensus drives decision-making within parties. Different intra-party actors may have different preferences over the alternatives policy, office, or votes or a party that behaves as a catch-all party in some respects (or regions) may have the characteristics of a classic mass party in other places, or in other parts of its organizational structure.

SWAPO party should define itself as a moderate center left pan-africanist mass party within the framework and limits of a parliamentary system to consolidate democracy, improve governance, accelerate service delivery, and position the party favorably in the global context.

The mass party, unlike the elite-caucus party, emerged out of the experience of the mass movements organised on the basis of local branches mobilising for the election of representatives to parliament. Richard Katz and Peter Mair describe the emergence and character of the mass party as follows: The mass party, with its organized membership, formal structures and meetings, arose primarily among the newly activated, and often disenfranchised, elements of civil society as part of their (ultimately successful) struggle to gain a voice in, and eventually control over, the ruling structures of the state. Another political scholar, André Krouwel, describes the mass party as the mirror image of the elite party... only in the mass parties is there any formal machinery of enrolment, comprising the signing of a definitive undertaking and the payment of an annual subscription. The distinction between cadre and mass parties is not one of size but of struc-

ture. [3. p. 62].

SWAPO party, as a tested mass party and liberator, is a new mechanism for the empowerment of the polity, working to enable the people to set the agenda for discussion and encouraging the people to actively involve themselves in the selection of candidates for election.

The caveat, however, the party should accommodate, as Udo Froeser said, "the majority black on their land and the economy which is currently ran by a 'centrally colonial-apartheid' discriminating structure under the guise of a 'free market economy' which is nothing but an exclusive club, oligopolistic cartelized mafia type cartel' assisted by the unashamed proud heirs of colonial apartheid and by a hostile foreign controlled media reducing our leaders to illiterate buffoons (if they don't dance to their tunes)... creating favorable conditions for a take over of the region come 2014 after they did the ground work with the creation of splinter parties for 'regime change'. They are now selling our common heritage of the land and mines through dubious means. But the Namibian people are steadfast in their mass party that has focus and vision including of engaging the youth and bringing them into leadership positions before the baton was passed on to them. Namibia's aspirations for long term development are articulated in the national vision statement: *Vision 2030*. Overall, *Vision 2030* has challenged to move Namibia from a heavy industry based to a knowledge-based economy, where the key factors are specialized services & industries and ICT. Broad goals of the reform are to: accelerate economic growth and social development, eradicate poverty and social inequality, reduce unemployment and curb the spread of HIV/AIDS. Indeed, the SWAPO mass Party is on the right path, as minister of education Dr. Iyambo said.