

Nigeria, Zimbabwe and the Struggle for Black Majority Rule in South Africa

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Abstract

This work examines the contribution of Nigeria and Zimbabwe to the liquidation of apartheid and institutionalised racism in South Africa. It analyses the diplomatic engagement of both countries in intergovernmental organizations such as the UN, OAU and the Commonwealth in the struggle for the establishment of racial equality and democracy in South Africa. The work highlights the cooperation of Nigeria and Zimbabwe in efforts to end apartheid and racism in South Africa. Both countries were committed to pan-Africanism and united in commitment to anti-colonialism and racial equality and this made them to cooperate in the anti-apartheid struggle. A number of works exist on Nigeria's role in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, but there is hardly any that focuses on the cooperation between Nigeria and Zimbabwe in the struggle to end racism in the country. Anti-colonialism and racial equality were important foreign policy objectives that Nigeria adopted from independence in 1960 and this made her to be involved in the independence struggle in Zimbabwe. Nigeria's involvement in the independence movement in Zimbabwe contributed tremendously to Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 and following Zimbabwe's independence, both countries worked together to assist other African territories still under colonial rule. The work utilizes mainly oral sources, government records, reports of international organizations, newspaper reports and journal articles as sources of information. The work maintains that cooperation between Nigeria and Zimbabwe contributed extensively to the establishment of racial equality and democracy in South Africa in 1994. The study concludes that African states can build on the ideals of pan-Africanism to address contemporary problems as they did in the struggle against apartheid from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Keywords: Anti-Colonialism, Afrocentrism, Diplomacy, Apartheid.

Introduction

When Nigeria became independent in 1960, the eradication of colonialism and racialism in Africa were important foreign policy objectives it adopted. Nigeria's Prime Minister at independence, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, declared shortly after independence that "on the question of colonialism and racial discrimination... we in Nigeria will never compromise."¹ Jaja

Wachukwu, Nigeria's Minister of External Affairs under Prime Minister Balewa also affirmed that:

Our second objective in Africa is the total liberation of the whole of the African continent from foreign domination. There can be no going back on that: colonialism in all its ramifications anywhere in Africa must be ended. We would be failing in our duty if we did not use our full resources mental, moral and material in the struggle for the emancipation of the rest of the continent.²

It was in accordance with Nigeria's policy of the eradication of every form of colonialism and racism in Africa that Nigeria was involved in the liberation of Zimbabwe in 1980. In fact, Nigeria attained the status of frontline state because of its unwavering support for the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. With the independence of Zimbabwe in April 1980, Zimbabwe became a member of the international community such as the UN, OAU, and the Commonwealth, organizations of which Nigeria was already a member. Nigeria and Zimbabwe were committed to Africa's decolonisation and this made both countries to work cooperatively in the international arena to support independence movements, especially in Southern Africa.

South Africa under Apartheid

After the end of British dominion over South Africa in 1948, the white minority Dutch took over the responsibility of governing South Africa. The political administration of South Africa by the white minority party the Afrikaner Nationalist Party (ANP) was unfriendly to the indigenous black African majority who constituted by far the larger part of the population. Prime Minister P.W. Botha under the auspices of ANP introduced the "apartheid system" which officially became a state policy and principle by which the South Africans were governed. Under the system, the indigenous blacks were relegated to second-class citizens in their own land. The basic ethos of Apartheid is the racial superiority of minority whites who came into the country in 1652 against indigenous majority black.³ Black people were segregated, exploited and denied basic human and political rights under the apartheid system. Blacks in South African during the period of the apartheid system were at the mercies of the white minority. The future of African blacks in South Africa during this period was a mixture of hope and bitterness. Apartheid as instrument of state policy was an extension of discriminatory and segregationists practices were the black African majority were continually oppressed and downgraded by the white minority government. In South Africa, approximately 19% of the nearly 25 million populations are white.⁴

Rev. Canon L. John Collins, South African representative at the World Conference for Action against Apartheid: Unite in Action for Liberation of Southern Africa: A Plea to all Nations held in Lagos, Nigeria, on 22-26 1977, stated that:

The evil of Apartheid is unique, not because it is unique in operation and extent: greater numbers of innocent people have been imprisoned without trial, tortured and murdered under other regimes than has yet been the case in South Africa. What makes South Africa unique is that there the Ideology of operation is enshrined in the law, the constitution, and the whole way of life. It represents the deliberate

and ideological imposition of oppression by a powerful minority group upon a much larger group on ground that we would, if we were not all a little mad, regard as utterly accidental, trivial and irrelevant ...on the ground merely of the colour of a person's skin. Apartheid is not only uniquely evil; it is uniquely crazy too.⁵

The policies of apartheid deprived the indigenous people a good education, housing and good jobs. Movement of the blacks was restricted with the introduction of the pass law. Why the white minority lived in a luxurious apartment with blacks as slaves. Every attempt at opposing the apartheid policies by the blacks often ends up in mass molestation, arrest, dehumanisation, detention and torture by the racist regime. To prevent the resurgence of the blacks against the racist regime, hard laws were enacted like the pass law, the Group Area Act and so on. The obnoxious policy was to come under criticism from within and outside after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 and the Soweto massacre of 1976.

Before the 1960 and 1976 massacres, there has been an organised resistance movement against the apartheid government in South Africa. At the home front, many groups notably the African National Congress (ANC), Socialist Party and the Zulu ethnic groups mounted fierce protests against the evil system. As the protests repeatedly fell on deaf ears, the oppressed changed their strategy by embarking on acts of sabotage and guerrilla warfare.⁶ The African National Congress (ANC) was formed in 1912 with the aim of channeling the course of the African people. In 1960, the group opposed the pass law enacted by the racist regime which led to the mass killings and shooting of the black protesters by the South African police. This event became popularly known as the "Sharpeville massacre".

The Sharpeville massacre was condemned by independence African states and other concerned nations. At the United Nations, the situation in South Africa was largely discussed and a number of resolutions condemning the policies of the apartheid regime adopted and were supported by Nigeria and Zimbabwe. For example, Nigeria's airport facilities were shot against South Africa, while in Zimbabwe borders were closed against the racist government in South Africa, all in compliance with the international community resolutions. The total eradication of apartheid in South Africa was intensified after the Soweto massacre. The UN Security Council Resolution 392 (1976) reaffirmed that "the policy of apartheid is a crime against the conscience and dignity of mankind and seriously disturbs international peace and security". Furthermore, the resolution recognised the "legitimacy of the struggle of the South African people for the elimination of apartheid and racial discrimination".⁷

Contribution of Nigeria and Zimbabwe to the establishment of Racial Equality and Democracy in South Africa

Nigeria and Zimbabwe made impressive contribution to the liquidation of apartheid and the establishment of democracy in South Africa in 1994. Both countries supported anti-apartheid movements and confronted the racist regime at different times in the 1980s. They also exploited membership of international organizations such as the United Nations, the OAU and the

Commonwealth in their efforts to end institutionalised racism in South Africa. Nigeria and Zimbabwe found the organisations useful because the three IGOs were committed to ending apartheid. They therefore provided the platform for the mobilisation of the support of other countries to pressurise the apartheid regime in South Africa to change policy. Nigeria and Zimbabwe thus gave backing to the OAU resolutions on colonialism and racialism in Africa. As part of measures to end apartheid, the Assembly of Heads of States and Government of the OAU met in Abuja, Nigeria in 1991, in what became known as “Abuja Declaration” on South Africa, where over twenty-seven (27) items were made on apartheid policy in South Africa. In the meeting, African Heads of States and Government including Nigeria and Zimbabwe reaffirmed their support for the people of South Africa. The last item of the Declaration stated thus:

Let all the people of the world reaffirm their resolve to act in concert to assist the people of South Africa to regain their liberty without further delay. Let all our actions be guided by this noble objective, knowing that our own freedom will remain circumscribed as long as the people of South Africa are not free, and, knowing that our own actions can make a decisive contribution to the speed with which the final liquidation of the system of white minority rule on our continents is achieved. Let all of us walk the last mile together and, together arrive at the common destination of the liquidation of the system of apartheid as well as the transformation.⁸

With the experience of Zimbabwe in racialism, Robert Mugabe who becomes the president of Zimbabwe saw the evil and barbaric nature embedded in racist policies and unconditionally provided supports ranging from financial, material and territorial to the liberation groups. For example, Zimbabwe made her territory available to the fleeing members of the ANC and PAC, and from the Zimbabwean territory, guerrilla attacks were launched against the racist government in South Africa. Thus, in its external relations and interactions, Zimbabwe has strongly promoted the non-negotiable principle of self-determination for all the peoples of Africa. This policy was not changed by the Unity Accord between ZANU-PF and ZAPU-PF, under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo, ZAPU-PF had always been equally committed to the liberation of the African continent.⁹

Nigeria has also given unconditional support to the ANC and PAC in the course of the South African liberation just like Zimbabwe. Following the Sharpeville and the Soweto massacre, the Nigerian government from 1960 provided material, financial and even military assistance to the ANC. Trade ban was imposed on South Africa in April 1961, banned from employment into the Nigerian Federal Service and the height of it all was the expulsion of the South Africa Dutch Reformed Church from Nigeria. The Nigerian airport, seaport, and airspace facilities were shot against South Africa.

In accordance with the United Nations resolution 1761 (XVII) of 1962, Nigeria and Zimbabwe apply the following measures as adopted by the General Assembly of the UN:

- i. Breaking off diplomatic relations with the South African government or refraining from establishing such relations;
- ii. Closing their ports to all vessels flying the South African flag;
- iii. Enacting legislation prohibiting their ships from entering South African ports;
- iv. Boycotting all South African goods and refraining from exporting goods, including all arms and ammunition, to South Africa;
- v. Refusing landing and passage facilities to all aircraft belonging to the South African government and companies registered under the laws of South Africa.¹⁰

Also, both countries, in accordance with the OAU, Harare Declaration on Racism, condemned the enacted laws of the racist government in South Africa. For examples, the Population Registration Act, the Land Act, the Group Areas Act and the Special Amenities Act, which are the four main evil pillars of apartheid policy, were jointly condemned. These laws led to the massive movement of blacks to neighbouring countries because of its harsh implementation. Those that seek refuge in neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe, Namibia and Zambia were received and treated accordingly. Although Nigeria was not a neighbouring state to South Africa, because of its desire to liberate all blacks from the shackle of racial and colonial regimes, Nigeria made it her responsibility to render financial, material and humanitarian assistance to Southern African countries.

Many South Africans were awarded scholarship by the Nigerian government to study in the country's Universities, colleges of education and polytechnics. The campaign against apartheid South Africa was so strong in Nigeria to the extent that youth clubs were formed to create domestic and public awareness on the evil of apartheid. At some level, the then Head of State Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo threatened to use all means available to fight down this evil system including invoking Blackman's power.¹¹ Nigeria and Zimbabwe were largely committed to rendering financial, material and humanitarian assistance to the ANC liberation group in South Africa

Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, Nigerian military Head of States and President Robert Mugabe expressed concern over the basic institutions and laws of apartheid that were still in place even when Mr. de Klerk has introduced some measure geared toward bringing about change in South Africa. They called on Mr. de Klerk to remove forthwith all obstacles to meaningful negotiations in keeping with the Harare Declaration of the OAU and the Special United Nations General Assembly Declaration on South Africa.¹² The Nigerian government provided the ANC with the opportunity to set up information centres in Nigeria where anti-racial messages were sent to the world making them know the horrific nature of apartheid system. In the same vein, Zimbabwe provided ANC with the Harare, Capital of Zimbabwe where propaganda activities against apartheid South Africa can broadcast. Diplomatic, consular and trade ban was imposed by the OAU and UN member states and the Frontline States aimed at toppling the apartheid system been practised in South Africa. Nigeria and Zimbabwe unanimously appeal to the international community to sustain their sanctions against apartheid South Africa until democratic South Africa emerged.

Nigeria under the auspices of the OAU supported the ANC appealed to the United Nations to implement the consumer boycotts and economic sanctions as an instrument to compel apartheid South Africa to abolish the racist rule in South Africa. The plea was first made at the All-African People's Conference held in 1959 in Ghana Accra and in December 1959, at the annual conference of the International Confederation of Free Trade Union, the plea was granted. Also in the same vein, on 24 June 1960, a Second Conference was held in Addis Ababa by leaders of independence Africa states, and resolutions were adopted urging all African states to impose sanctions in its entire ramification against apartheid South Africa. In July 1964, resolutions were adopted on the imposition of sanctions on South Africa by the Council of Ministers at the 3rd Ordinary Session held in Cairo, some of these resolutions stated thus:

1. TO APPEAL to all oil-producing countries to cease as a matter of urgency their supply of oil and petroleum products to South Africa;
2. TO CALL on all African States to implement forthwith the decision taken in Addis Ababa, in May 1963, to boycott South African goods and to cease the supply of minerals and other raw materials to South Africa;
3. TO REQUEST the co-operation of all countries and in particular that of the major trading partners of South Africa in the boycott of South African goods.¹³

In the Anti-apartheid Conference held in August, 1977 in Lagos, member states of the OAU and the Frontline States unanimously resolved and stop conducting business with companies that maintained affiliation with the racial government in South Africa and to stop the supply of raw materials to these companies because they were perceived as the facilitator and powerhouse of apartheid South Africa. On this unanimous agreement by members, General Obasanjo stated that Nigeria was...compiling information on enterprises that depend on our raw materials and markets but continue to help our enemies. Such enterprises must decide now to choose between us and our enemies and all that goes with that choice...Foreign contractors who are known to have links or connections with South Africa are already barred from taking part in any transactions or construction works in Nigeria.¹⁴

With the active cooperation of the members of the OAU and Commonwealth, apartheid South Africa was not only expelled from the Commonwealth of Nations in 1960 but was also prevented from participating in international sports games like the Commonwealth Games and the International Rugby competitions. On the expulsion of South Africa from the international community, the United States supported the course of Africa's campaigns for South African expulsion. To show US attitude toward South African race problem, public opinions was conducted by the United States Information Agency (USIA) between October 21 and November 1, 1963, in Nigeria. See table below:

“South Africa should be expelled from the United Nations”.

No. of Cases (180)

Agree	55%
Disagree	37%
No opinion	8%
Total	100%

Source: U.S., Attitude Toward Americans and South African Race Problems Among lesser Educated Nigerians in Greater Lagos. USIA, Research and Reference Service, June 1964.

In addition, International seminars on the eradication of apartheid and in support of the struggle for liberation in South Africa were convened by African leaders under the auspices of the OAU with participants from UN, Asia and the non-governmental organisations. Notable of these seminars are International Seminar on the Eradication of Apartheid and in Support of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa, held in Havana, Cuba from 24-28 May 1976, World Conference for Action against Apartheid, held in Lagos Nigeria’s former capital from 22-26 August 1977 etc. These seminars and conferences were to encourage African and non-African member’s states and the international community to support the courses of the liberation struggle in Africa.

In the “International Seminar on the Eradication of Apartheid and in Support for the Struggle for black majority rule in South Africa”, sponsored by the Special Committee against Apartheid in consultation with the OAU, participants expressed their support and solidarity to the black majority rule movement group in South Africa, (ANC). Nigeria’s Head of State, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, sent a message from the seminar to the liberation group in South Africa where he stated that:

...the crime of apartheid is particularly notorious for its callousness and inhumanity. It manifests its callousness through institutionalised exploitation and brutalisation of the African, and it demonstrates its inhumanity through a programme of separate development aimed at degrading the black man and leaving him physically and mentally weakened by poverty, disease and ignorance. At the Special OAU Summit held in January 1976, at Addis Ababa, my late predecessor lucidly stated our stand on apartheid. I wish to assure all of you that the Nigerian Government stands by its declarations against apartheid.¹⁵

A statement by E.O. Ogbu, a Nigerian who was elected as Chairman Special Committee on Apartheid on 12 October 1972 similarly stated thus:

...with the task ahead of us clearly defined, with the dedication and commitment by all of us present and the hope and desires of the people of South Africa cast upon us..., I took forward to work with every increasing effort and unwavering

determination to find new ways and methods to undermine the unholy regime in South Africa. My Government, as well as the people of my country, stand behind me in this endeavour. I am confident that together we shall work in the future to find these ways and therefore help to restore the confidence to the United Nations that the oppressed people of South Africa have nearly lost.¹⁶

Also, in Nigeria and Zimbabwe, anti-racial movements also gained wide supports from “musical artists”. Music artists in Nigeria and Zimbabwe sang songs and organised music shows in the public places condemning racism and colonialism in Southern Africa. Musical artists like Steve Wonder’s “it is wrong” sang in 1985, Peter Gabriel’s “Biko” sang in 1980, Bright Blue’s “weeping” sang in 1987, Sonny Okosun’s “Fire in Soweto” sang in 1978 and Thomas Mapfumo’s “Zig Zag Band” 1980, from Zimbabwe. In an interview with Fer D. D., Deputy Director, National Archives of Nigeria, he stated that “Fire in Soweto” by Sonny Okosun and the “Zig Zag Band” from Zimbabwe, gained overwhelming national and international recognition because both anti-apartheid songs revealed the humiliation, poverty and deaths faced by a lot of African brothers and sisters in South Africa, Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique under the white minority regimes in Africa.¹⁷

South Africa was for several years isolated and excommunicated by the international community because of its apartheid policy. Apartheid system existed till the early 1990s when a process of democratisation was initiated by the last apartheid President, Fredrick de Klerk...¹⁸ After series of constitutional engagement and pressure from both international and regional organisations, South Africa in 1994 adopted a new constitution and elections were held which saw the emergence of a first black majority government led by Nelson Mandela. Mandela was a revolutionary ANC leader. He organised protests and supported by anti-racist countries like Nigeria and Zimbabwe against apartheid South Africa. He was released from jail after a long detention by the apartheid government. On his release from prison in 1990, he visited Nigeria where he expressed his gratitude for the role Nigeria played in the course of South Africa liberation. He also praised the braveness of the Frontline States including Zimbabwe in confronting the racist South African regime.

Conclusion

The history of Africa has been the history of the “white man” incursion. Beginning with European exploration down to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the advent of industrial revolution, the continent of Africa was dominated by European activities. The advent of Europeans in Africa necessarily led to interaction with African peoples. In many respects, the pattern of interaction has not been mutually beneficial. In different parts of the continent, Africans have been massively exploited, degraded and dehumanised by European settlers. In South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, racial policies were adopted by the white colonial masters. Due to the dehumanising and degrading nature of the colonial and racial system, Africans began to form resistance movements against the colonial government. The end of the Second World War and the establishment of the United Nations Charter against racism gave impetus to liberation

movements in Africa. In 1960, Nigeria had her independence from Britain after series of constitutional negotiation and protests. Zimbabwe (former Rhodesia) had its independence in 1980 after wars of the liberation struggle against the white minority regime of Ian Smith.

Nigeria and Zimbabwe collaborated in efforts to end apartheid and racism in South Africa. Both countries were committed to pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism and gave massive financial, humanitarian and material support to the organizations that were at the forefront of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa such as the ANC. For example, the territory of Zimbabwe was used to launch guerrilla attacks on the apartheid government in South Africa at different times. Nigeria, for its part, provided financial, military support and scholarships to citizens of South Africa. Both Nigeria and Zimbabwe also utilised the avenues provided by intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations and the OAU to pressurize the apartheid government in South Africa to change policy. All these efforts contributed to the liquidation of apartheid and the establishment of multi-party democracy in South Africa in 1994. African states can build on the ideals of pan-Africanism to address contemporary problems as they did in the struggle against apartheid from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Notes

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