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Shorter Version for Delivery

THE SUNSET OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: FROM BISMARCK TO BARACK, FROM NUJOMA TO MANDELA

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Your excellencies, distinguished celebrities, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks for this opportunity to celebrate 50 years of post-coloniality.

But instead of limiting myself to 50 years of Africa's independence, I have decided to include the preceding 100 years of colonialism.

Instead of 1957 with Ghana's independence, I have gone back to the Conference of Berlin 1884–1885.

Instead of starting with Sam Nujoma and Nelson Mandela, I am going back to Bismarck.

Some historians have viewed Bismarck as the German grandfather of Namibia—just as Lord Lugard was the British grandfather of Nigeria; and President Monroe as the American grandfather of Liberia.

It is one of the ironies of the great German leader Otto von Bismarck that he helped to unify Germany in the nineteenth century and initiated the division of Africa soon after. The unification of Germany led to the emergence of one of the most powerful Western countries in the twentieth century. The partition of Africa, on the other hand, resulted in some of the most vulnerable societies in modern world history.

In the second half of the twentieth century Germany was divided again—but this time ideologically between communist East Germany and the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany.

German unification at the end of the 20th century was almost a celebration of the centenary of Otto von Bismarck's final years as effective leader of the German Empire. Three European wars in the nineteenth century had helped German unification. These were Germany's war with Denmark in 1864; with Austria in 1866 and with France in

1871. Bismarck led the Germans in war and peace in this period—and he was made *Prince* Von Bismarck on March 21, 1871. He was appointed Chancellor of the German Empire also in 1871—and proceeded to govern the Germans from that year until 1890. He became the most influential Western statesman of his day.

Today the most influential statesman of the Western world is Barack Obama—more by virtue of the power of the United States than as a result of his own sustained personal performance in world affairs for the time being. Out of the juxtaposition of Bismarck with Obama a number of historical dialectics emerge, a number of political paradoxes. Obama is partly a descendant of the Africa which Bismarck had helped to partition.

Dazzling as Germany and the United States have been in the *capitalist* game for a century, they have been relatively marginal as old-style *colonial* powers. Neither country built a large territorial colonial empire. The United States limited itself to the Philippines and a few islands as colonial possessions. Germany had a larger territorial appetite than the United States, but did not succeed in keeping its colonies for long.

In the history of territorial imperialism in the one hundred years since the age of Bismarck, Germany and the United States have been *dwarfs* as colonial powers. Nevertheless, within the same period, Germany and the United States have often approximated the status of capitalist *giants*. That the two countries could be giants as capitalists and dwarfs as colonialists casts at least partial doubt on too easy a co-relation between capitalism and colonialism within the old Leninist paradigm.

The second dialectic concerning Germany and the United States is connected with the fact that Bismarck hosted a conference which officially launched the partition of

Africa. The United States, on the other hand, produced citizens who launched the ideology of the unity of Africa. Bismarck hosted that Berlin conference of 1884–1885 which brought together some sixteen Western powers. These states negotiated the ground rules for the European scramble for Africa. The United States was present at the Berlin conference but did not compete for African territory.

On the other hand, what the United States' racial policies at home were doing was to begin to produce a cadre of African Americans who were for the unification of the Black world as a whole. The great Pan-Africanist W.E.B. DuBois was born in February 1869 in Massachusetts. Before the end of the nineteenth century he was active in the organization of what became the first Pan-African Congress of 1900. Bismarck had played midwife to the partition of Africa. DuBois was to play midwife to the ideology of African unification. Yet divided Africa nevertheless managed to father a Black President of the United States, Barack Obama, with potential credentials for helping Africa to transcend its fragmentation.

A related paradox concerned Bismarck himself, the man who unified Germany and helped to divide Africa. Even in the unification of Germany he himself paid a price. As Ralph Haswell Lutz once put it:

> *The tragedy of Bismarck's career was that he himself created in United Germany the monarcho-military power which first overthrew him and then, in the fateful years of 1914–1918, destroyed his empire.*[1]

On the African front Bismarck had declared a hundred years earlier (in 1889) "I am not a colonial man." And yet for a while he succeeded in bringing Germany closer to the role of a colonial power in Africa than any other figure in history. In the 1880s Bismarck managed to get control of Cameroons, Tanganyika, Rwanda, Burundi, part of New Guinea, as well as South West Africa (now Namibia).

Bismarck had helped to set the stage of the West's penetration of Africa. His conference of Berlin had helped to define the rules of annexation, as we indicated.

It just so happened that the last remaining colony in continental Africa in the 1980s was, in a sense, Bismarck's colony. This was Namibia in South West Africa. Once a German colony following the conference of Berlin, it became a mandate of the League of Nations after World War I—and was then administrated by South Africa for more than half a century. It was supposed to be a trusteeship of the United Nations.

In the second half of the 20th century Namibia became the *penultimate nail* in the coffin of institutional racism. It was estimated after 1948 in the wake of apartheid that South Africa would become the final nail on that coffin of racist governance, but Namibia was deemed penultimate.

While South Africa was deteriorating with the massacre of unarmed Africans in Sharpeville in 1960, Namibia was launching the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in the same year. Apartheid as a policy was spreading to Namibia, but SWAPO was emerging to combat the racism.

Samuel Daniel Nujoma was a politician in his 30s at that time. He was elected President of SWAPO. He came to SWAPO with the credentials of belonging to the

Uukwambi Dynasty through his mother, Helvi Mpingana Kondombolo, and the father, Daniel Uutoni Nujoma. Samuel Daniel Nujoma was one of eleven children.

It was not easy for the penultimate nail on institutional racism to achieve its purpose. SWAPO struggled to delink Namibia from South Africa, without necessarily re-linking with the United Nations Trusteeship.

The struggle was long. But at last in a UN-supervised election in 1989 Nujoma was unanimously voted to become President if SWAPO prevailed. Nujoma ascended to the state presidency of Namibia in 1990.

Samuel Nujoma, Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama are potential icons of a future post-racial age, which is still unfolding. Nujoma was the penultimate nail on apartheid, Nelson Mandela has become the most respected Black man, by other races, in world history. Barack Obama is already a great man, but not yet a great President.

A major cause of this joint success, by Nujoma, Mandela and Obama, lies in their embodying a short memory of racial hate, and in their impressive readiness to forgive historic adversaries. They have all illustrated a capacity to transcend historic racial divides.

Cultures differ in hate retention. Some cultures nurse their grievances for generations. Other cultures may be intensely hostile in the midst of a conflict, but as soon as the conflict has ended they display a readiness to forgive, even if not always to forget.

Armenians were butchered in large numbers by Ottoman Turks way back in 1915–1916. It has turned out that Armenian culture has considerable proclivity towards hate retention. The story of the Armenian martyrdom of World War I has been

transmitted with passion from generation to generation. Armenians are still demanding justice from Turkey nearly one hundred years after the massacres.

The Irish also have long memories of grievance. Clashes occur in Northern Ireland every year concerning marches which commemorate "Orange conflicts" in the seventeenth century.

Jews also have strong collective memories of the Holocaust and earlier outbursts of European anti-Semitism. But Jews have been more subtle in their troubled relationship with Germany.

Nelson Mandela came from a culture which is illustrative of Africa's short memory of hate. That culture is far from being pacifist. Wars and inter-ethnic conflicts have been part of Africa's experience from before European colonization and decades after independence. What is different about African culture is Africa's relatively low level of hate retention. Helped by the United Nations *SWAPO* as a militant movement was in a forgiving mood in 1989–1990.

Barack Obama's tolerant multi-culturalism may be due to personal factors. He had a white American mother, a Black Kenyan father, and an Indonesian step-father. His cultural ancestry includes Luo culture, Islam and Black American Christianity.

Mandela's life passed through stages. His early days as an African nationalist were characterized by a belief in non-violent resistance. In a sense, he carried the torch of South Africa's Albert Luthuli and Mahtma Gandhi. Sharpeville was a major blow to his belief in passive resistance. The African National Congress, within which he had become one of the top leaders, finally embraced the option of armed struggle and Mandela became Commander-in-Chief. When Mandela was finally sentenced to life imprisonment

in 1964, after the Rivonia trial, some expected him to become more bitter than ever. Twenty-seven years later he emerged from prison as "truth and reconciliation" personified. The former Commander-in-Chief of armed struggle emerged in 1990 ready to hold the olive branch, magnanimous in triumph rather than submissive in defeat. Barack Obama manifested not only racial reconciliation but also an opposition to pointless warfare like that of Iraq.

But we need to place Nelson Mandela in the context of other African leaders as well as African Americans. Postcolonial Africa had produced other leaders who had illustrated Africa's short memory of hate. Jomo Kenyatta was condemned by a British colonialist as "leader unto darkness and death"—and imprisoned in a remote part of Kenya. He emerged from imprisonment on the eve of independence and proclaimed "suffering without bitterness." He transformed Kenya into a staunchly pro-Western country. A short memory of hate indeed!

Ian Smith unleashed a civil war in Zimbabwe when he unilaterally declared independence. He lived to sit in a parliament of Black-ruled Zimbabwe and was not subjected to postwar vendetta or trial. Again, Africa's short memory of hate was manifested. Samuel Nujoma presided over a post-apartheid Namibia.

Nigeria waged the most highly publicized civil war of postcolonial Africa, which cost nearly a million lives. The Federal side under General Yakubu Gowon won the war—but was magnanimous towards the defeated Biafrans. Yet another manifestation of Africa's short memory of hate.

By the time Nelson Mandela was having afternoon tea with the unrepentant widow of the founder of apartheid, Mrs. Verwoerd, he had tough acts to follow in African

magnanimity. There were precedents of forgiveness before him, which he followed and improved upon.

Obama had to prove his post-racial tolerance by denouncing his firebrand pastor, Jeremiah Wright, and by leaving his own radicalized church.

In comparing Mandela with other postcolonial African leaders and with Barack Obama, there were other elements of style to be taken into account.

Postcolonial Africa, and its Diaspora, produced five styles of political leadership. A *charismatic* leadership style depends mainly on the personal magnetism of the leader—and is best illustrated by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and indeed Obama and Martin Luther King, Jr. *Mobilizational* style uses ideology and party organization to mobilize the masses, and is best illustrated by Julius K. Nyerere of Tanzania and indeed Obama's mobilization of young Americans. The *Managerial* style uses skills of management and technocratic pragmatism, and this is illustrated by the second South African president, Thabo Mbeki and Felix Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, who died in 1993. A *Coercive* style of political leadership relies mainly on a regime of fear and demands for compliance and obedience. Most military regimes have been coercive in that sense, perhaps best illustrated by Idi Amin of Uganda. However, there have also been civilian regimes of coercion and fear—like that of Hastings Banda of Malawi and Sekou Touré of Guinea (Conakry). The apartheid model was also coercive.

Finally, there is *Conciliatory* style of political leadership, which is predisposed towards compromise and reconciliation. *Where do Barack Obama, Samuel Nujoma and Nelson Mandela fit in?*

Because of Mandela's record, after he was released from prison in 1990, there is a temptation to think of Mandela primarily as an example of conciliatory leadership. But, in fact, the younger Mandela was a powerful combination of charisma and mobilization—rather than a conciliatory leader. Is such charismatic conciliation also characteristic of Obama? Mandela's personal magnetism enabled him to rise rapidly in the African National Congress Youth League (NACYL). In 1952, he was elected National Volunteer-Chief and proceeded to traverse the country—trying to organize resistance as part of the ANC Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws. Because of his role in the Defiance Campaign, he was accused of violating the Suppression of Communism Act. He was convicted, but his record of strict non-violence at that stage earned him a suspended sentence and a confinement within the boundaries of the city of Johannesburg. Much later, Barack Obama was accused of Black American extremism and was even suspected of being a closet Muslim. But he was not tried in court!

Mandela's role in the Defiance campaign propelled him to the Presidency of the Youth League, the Presidency of the Transvaal ANC branch, and the Deputy Presidency of the African National Congress as a whole.

The ANC's initial policies still reflected the philosophies of non-violent resistance, which had been advocated earlier by Mohandas Gandhi (later Mahatma) and Albert Luthuli (the first African Nobel Prize Laureate). The ANC's Programme of Action was inspired by the Youth League and envisaged a struggle based on civil disobedience, labour strikes and non-cooperation. Mandela was heavily involved in much of the planning, the organization and the implementation of such methods of struggle. In anticipation of the possible banning of the ANC, Mandela accepted the awesome

responsibility of preparing a master-plan for underground networking and secret lines of communication. But, in most of the 1950's, Nelson Mandela, as a mobilization leader, was averse to violence. He also helped to promote the *Freedom Charter* which had been adopted by the Congress of the People in 1955.

It was not until June 1961 that the African National Congress, after a long and agonizing reappraisal, reached the conclusion that violence could no longer be ruled out against a coercive regime of racial intolerance. It was in the same year, 1961, that the *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the armed wing of the ANC, was formed with Nelson Mandela as its Commander-in-Chief. Mandela, as a charismatic leader, was now involved in *armed* mobilization.

Even after Mandela was eventually sentenced to life imprisonment, and taken to the notorious maximum security fortress-cage on Robben Island, he continued to reaffirm the legitimacy of armed struggle. Later he was transferred to a less isolated prison in Cape Town [Pollsmor and Victor Vester prisons]. The apartheid regime offered him remission of sentence in exchange for renouncing violence. He turned the offer down.

And, yet, when he was finally released, in February 1990, this most illustrious of all Africa's liberation fighters embarked on a mission of healing and forgiving. This former hero of mobilization leadership became a paragon of the reconciliation style. Mandela became the greatest of all African examples of prolonged reconciliation and an exemplar of Africans' short memory of hate.

Barack Obama is more of an ideological liberal than a moral Gandhian. Indeed, Obama is less of a Gandhian than Martin Luther King, Jr. was. But in their very different

ways, Mandela, Barack Obama and M. L. King have all been part of the search for a post-racial age.

While Nelson Mandela has been a force for reconciliation, between black and white, he has been less compromising as a Southern warrior in North-South relations. Similarly, while Obama has offered the olive branch in relations between Black and White, he has been less compromising as a campaigner of the poor against the rich.

They may both discover what Martin Luther King Jr. was beginning to realize in 1968—that abolishing racism may be accomplished much sooner than abolishing poverty. Namibia learnt similar lessons.

On the African continent a small country was destined to be the final nail in the coffin of racist governance. The struggle was led by a man called Samuel Daniel Nujoma.

When Namibia became independent, apartheid was doomed not only in Namibia but also in South Africa. The penultimate nail of Namibia sealed the fate of racism on the African continent—but the struggle continues in America, in spite of the triumphs of Obama.

South Africa had been for a long time unenthusiastic about granting Namibia independence—least of all under the prospective rule of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 raised South Africa's hope. Pretoria continued to drag her feet on the issue of Namibia's independence—urging Reagan to order his Western allies to cool it in their pressures on Pretoria.

Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker under President Reagan disappointed South Africa in the end—and lent his weight to speedy independence for Namibia, mainly in order to facilitate a Cuban withdrawal from neighboring and beleaguered

Angola. But more fundamentally, Namibia's independence was a historic prelude to the collapse of apartheid in South Africa.

Let us now look more closely at the wider ramifications of Bismarck's Berlin conference. It was indeed in 1884 that Bismarck had opened that momentous conference. By 1994 Africa was trying to close the last chapter of partition with an election to abolish political apartheid in South Africa. Between the two events were one hundred and ten years of European penetration of Africa. Let us now look more closely at the aftermath of the Berlin conference.

I. Fragmentation and the Paradox of Racial Deficit

The partition of the continent unleashed unprecedented changes in African societies—political, economic, cultural and psychological. This overview of those changes pays particular attention to their implications for problems of security and governance over that period of a century and ten years. We shall conclude with a search for solutions in the era of Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama.

And yet the seeds of the post-colonial wars themselves lie in the sociological mess which the post-Berlin partition created in Africa by destroying ancient boundaries of identity and old methods of conflict-resolution without creating effective substitute ones in their place.

II. The Paradox of Fatal Bismarckian Borders

While most African conflicts are partly caused by borders, those conflicts are not necessarily *about* borders. The conflicts are partly caused by Bismarckian borders

because those were created by colonial powers to enclose groups with no traditions of shared authority or shared systems of settling disputes. The human chemistry between those groups has not necessarily had time to become congenial.[2] Namibians have resisted being integrated into South Africa.

On the other hand, African governments have tended to be possessive about colonial borders and have discouraged challenging them. The borders generate conflicts *within* them, but have not normally generated conflict *across* them. The recent war between Ethiopia and Eritrea is more an exceptional *inter-state* conflict than a rule.[3]

III. Between Religion and Ethnicity

While the worst conflicts in Arab Africa are at least partly religious, the worst conflicts in Black Africa are ethnic (so called "tribal"). Algeria in the 1990s had the worst conflict in Arab Africa proper, and the boundary was between Islamists and militant secularists. It was one of the ugliest wars in the world.[4] Egypt in Arab Africa has also had recurrent *religious* conflict.[5] Again the boundary has been between the sacred and the secular. The worst conflict in Black Africa by the 1990s was between the Hutu and Tutsi, especially with the genocides in Rwanda and Burundi in the 1990s.[6] These recurrent explosions have been *ethnic* in the so-called "tribal" sense.

Sudan is caught in-between. Was the conflict between North and South primarily ethnic or primarily religious?[7] What about the Darfur chaos? Choose your own diagnosis. In Somalia the conflict is often sub-ethnic—i.e., between *clans* rather than between tribes.[8]

IV. Between Identities and Resources

While Black against White in Africa is a clash over resources, Black against Black is more often a clash of identities. The thesis here is that racial conflicts in Africa are ultimately *economic*, whereas tribal wars are ultimately *cultural*. White folks and Black folks fight each other about *who owns what*. Black folks and Black folks fight each other about *who is who*. Apartheid was ultimately an economic war. But Hutu against Tutsi is a culture-conflict. The demarcation of property may be less deadly than the clash of identities.

For twenty seven years while he was in detention Mandela was a role model for the Black world as a whole because he struck to his principles in the face of adversity. Nelson Mandela has been a role model to Barack Obama, as well as to many others. There are signs that, like Mandela, Barack Obama has learnt to stick to his principles in the face of massive adversity.

In the context of global Africa as a whole the torch has indeed been passed from a South African warrior in his nineties to a Black American campaigner in his forties, from a former President in Africa to a new president in America, from an old voice of unity still reverberating from Southern Africa to a younger voice of redemption echoing in the Diaspora.

Mandela and Nujoma are among the architects of a *post-racism* age. Obama is helping to foster a *post-racial* condition. A world without racism is not necessarily a world without race consciousness. Mandela is an abolitionist to end racism as prejudice; Obama seeks to realize a world without race-consciousness as a demographic category. Nujoma is caught in between.

These are major steps towards reversing the global repercussions of the Berlin conference of 1884–1885. But other ghosts of Bismarck's conference will continue to haunt Africa for a few more generations to come. The struggle against the legacy of Berlin continues.

President Monroe had been recognized as the Amerian grandfather of Liberia. The capital of Liberia had been named after him—Monrovia after Monroe. Lord Lugard has been recognized as the British grandfather of Nigeria. Did Lugard choose the name of Nigeria? Or was the name Nigeria chosen by Lady Lugard? Bismarck helped to change the history of a whole continent. Was South West Africa Bismarck's last African colony? Let us think of SWAPO as one of the last nails in the coffin of Bismarck's imperial legacy.

NOTES

1. Lutz, "Bismarck," Collier's Encyclopedia (New York: Macmillan Education Corporation and P.F. Collier Inc., Vol. 4 (out of 24 volumes) 1980, p. 224.

2. Not surprisingly, an article in *The Economist* 352 (January 25, 1997), p. 17, argues that borders have not been the primary cause of conflict.

.3 For an interesting article on this conflict, see Kjetil Tronvoll, "Borders of Violence-Boundaries of Identity: Demarcating the Eritrean Nation-State," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, 6 (November 1999), pp. 1037–60.

4. An overview of this conflict may be found in Robert A. Mortimer, "Islamists, Soldiers and Democrats: The Second Algerian War," *The Middle East Journal* 50 (Winter 1996), pp. 18–39.

5. The struggle between religious groups in Egypt is analyzed in Hamied A. Ansari, "Sectarian Conflict in Egypt and The Political Expediency of Religion," *The Middle East Journal* 38 (Summer 1984), pp. 18–39, and for a recent article on the conflict, see *The Economist* 354 (January 8, 2000), p. 41.

6. Descriptions of the genocide may be found in Edward Nyakanvzi, *Genocide: Rwanda and Burundi* (Rochester, VT: Schenkman Books, 1998).

7. For one analysis of the identity conflicts that have bedeviled Sudan and brought war among the Sudanese, see Francis Deng, *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1995).

8. The Somalian descent is chronicled in Alice B. Hashim, *The Fallen State: Dissonance, Dictatorship and Death in Somalia* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997).