

https://dspace.org/

Analysing Namibia's transition towards democracy: historical reflections

Saunders, Christopher

1994-07-13T06:08:16Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8074

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

SAUNDERS

DEMOCRACY



POPULAR
PRECEDENTS
PRACTICE
CULTURE

13 - 15 JULY 1994

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

HISTORY WORKSHOP

ANALYSING NAMIBIA'S TRANSITION TOWARDS DEMOCRACY:
HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Christopher Saunders
History Department
University of Cape Town

AFRICANA

Fax: South Africa 11-339-7634
History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, July 1994

ANALYSING NAMIBIA'S TRANSITION TOWARDS DEMOCRACY: HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Christopher Saunders

(University of Cape Town)

1. INTRODUCTION

On 21 March 1990 there was a clear-cut break with the past when Namibia moved from de facto colonial rule to independence. Somewhat more ambiguously, the country also moved from authoritarianism to democracy. The country became formally democratic, with a liberal-democratic constitution and a multi-party state system, and the leader of the main opposition party was able to say, over two years after independence: 'democracy is now firmly established in Namibia'.[1] Yet in the fullest account to be written of the recent history of SWAPO, Colin Leys and John Saul, left writers disappointed that SWAPO has followed capitalist and not socialist paths since independence, are unwilling to accept that post-independence Namibia is democratic in any real sense, and they speak of 'liberation without democracy'.[2] It is necessary, therefore, before we proceed with an analysis of how and why the country's transition towards democracy occurred, to explore the nature of that transition and the extent to which such a transition can indeed be said to have taken place.

The new political order ushered in at independence was certainly strikingly different from that in place prior to the year of formal transition in which Namibia moved to independence. The constitution adopted by the Constituent Assembly in February 1990 - widely called the most liberal constitution in Africa and a model for the rest of the continent[3] - provided for regular elections based on universal adult suffrage, a Bill of Fundamental Rights, an independent judiciary, a bicameral Parliament, and an executive president with limited powers. Such a constitution placed Namibia on a very different political footing from that which had existed under South African rule.

While considerable powers had been transfered from Pretoria to Windhoek at different times from the late 1970s, until independence ultimate power had remained in the hands of the South African government and its appointee, the Administrator-General. It was the South African government which had put in place the Transitional Government of National Unity in June 1985, and the TGNU had not even been legitimated by a South African-run election, on the lines of the one conducted in December 1978. The Bill of

Fundamental Rights included in the legislation providing for the transitional government, intended to provide the TGNU with some legitimacy, had proved to be of very limited practical benefit in curbing the power of that government. While the advent of the TGNU did open some space for mass mobilisation,[4] and there was a remarkably free press,[5] one can nevertheless say that prior to the formal transition of 1989-90 Namibia was ruled semi-dictatorially, and that for the majority of the populace the colonial system did not provide democratic experience or act as a source of democratic values but was instead seen as an alien imposition which encouraged the idea that government could do as it wished.[6]

Then during the formal transition of 1989-90 the rule of the Adminstrator-General was monitored by the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group, and an election was held which the UN Special Representative declared, when the results were announced, to have been free and fair, and one that had given the world 'a shining lesson in democracy; exemplary as to commitment, restraint and tolerance'.[7] With the new constitution in place from the day of independence, democrats could hope that the great democratic experience of the election would be consolidated, that the new constitution would effectively safeguard individual liberties and promote democratic values and practices, and that the new government would act in such a way that the constitution, and the institutions thereby established, would indeed be the framework within which a flourishing democracy would emerge. It was often said that Namibia was in the fortunate position of being able to learn from the negative experiences of so many other African countries, where independence had come much earlier but where democratic beginnings had not lasted. As Namibia began its democratic experiment, some of those countries were trying to return to a democratic path, in a 'second wave' of democratisation.[8]

But for Leys and Saul, for whom democracy means popular empowerment and government that is truly of the people, by the people and for the people, there is little but the trappings of democracy in post-independence Namibia.[9] It is certainly true that the Namibian constitution is 'a profoundly conservative instrument'[10] and that there has been no significant redistribution of wealth and resources since independence, no socio-economic transformation. A new form of elite politics has emerged to replace the previous one, there has been little popular participation in government outside elections and little of the accountability associated with a democratic culture in the society as a whole. Clearly Namibia does not measure up to a maximalist definition of democracy, which would exclude any society in which vast inequalities in the distribution of wealth exist - as they certainly do in Namibia.[11] But all

modern democracies are limited in the extent to which they are democratic, and purist or ideal-type definitions of democracy are of limited utility when applied to the real world. It is much more helpful to speak of democratisation, a historical process, and to pose the question of the extent to which a country is or has been democratic in more than a formal sense. A brief investigation of that question in relation to Namibia since independence would seem to suggest that there is no easy answer, not least because insufficient time has elapsed for a verdict to be pronounced.

On the one hand, one can cite ways in which the Swapo government has acted in a democratic manner and spirit: the remarkable extent to which it has promoted national reconciliation, for example, or the extraordinarily open way in which the Land Conference was held in June 1991, with the Prime Minister himself in the chair, a striking example of how, in a country with a population as small as Namibia's, popular views can be aired and presented to government.[12] The Swapo congress of December 1991, likewise, displayed democratic, as well as autocratic, features.[13] The human rights provisions in the constitution have not been violated, and the press remains free. And it is possible to lay great stress on the fact that a second nation-wide election, this time for regional and local candidates, and without an external monitoring presence, was held successfully toward the end of 1992, and that preparations are already underway for another Assembly election within the next year, as provided for in the constitution.

On the other hand, those who wish to define democracy as meaning more than periodic elections can point, say, to the fact that national reconciliation has meant retention of the status quo, and to examples of the govenment acting without popular consultation or a popular mandate , and failing to take popular wishes into account. It has refused to hold an enquiry into what went on in the Angolan camps in the 1980s, for example, and has done very little to implement, say, the resolutions of the Land conference.[14] Much is done in secret and without full disclosure, following the example set by the Constituent Assembly itself, which in November 1989 referred the drawing up of the new constitution to a standing committee which met behind closed doors. Not only was the public denied information about the debates in the committee, but when the new constitution emerged to be ratified by the Assembly, there was no question of submitting it to a referendum.[15] As the parties had by no means clearly spelt out what they were to propose to the Constituent Assembly during the election campaign, there was really no popular involvement in the writing of the constitution. Writing of the period since independence, Leys and Saul speak of popular dispowerment.[16]

It is not the purpose of this paper to conduct a detailed examination of the post-independence balance sheet or of the prospects for the consolidation of Namibia's fledgling democracy. Political scientists have already begun to undertake those tasks.[17] The focus of this paper is, instead, historical. It will proceed on the assumption that the jury is still out about the consolidation of democracy in Namibia, but that a basis was laid for democratic practices, and that therefore it is possible to talk of a transition to a kind of democracy in Namibia. The remaining discussion will reflect on the reasons for that transition. Besides analysing some of the pre-independence origins of the present democratic experiment in Namibia, mention will be made of factors which militated against a democratic outcome, which indeed appeared unlikely not all that long before independence. By looking at aspects of the decolonisation process in Namibia, the paper will attempt to offer some elements of an explanation - for a fully comprehensive explanation would require far more space - of why, in the event, the basis was laid for democratisation in Namibia. Such an examination of the Namibian case may be useful for those seeking to understand, and by understanding to promote, democratisation elsewhere.

2. ON THE POSSIBILITIES OF A DEMOCRATIC OUTCOME

It was by no means inevitable that a democratic order would emerge in Namibia at independence. The country had, after all, endured a long and bitter decolonisation conflict. A twenty-three year long war had been fought between SWAPO and the South African occupation regime, a war which had to some extent taken on the character of a civil war. Much of the north of the country had long been under a brutal occupation; much of the rest of Namibian society had by the late 1980s become highly militarised. Right-wing whites were known to be antipathetic to independence under a SWAPO government, to be heavily armed, and to have close links with the far right and elements in the security forces in South Africa. The gross inequalities and resultant class structure were hardly conducive to democracy.[18]

Before independence, as we have already noted, there was at best very limited forms of democratic practices within the country, confined to a section of the population. Such elections as were held between 1978 and 1988 - for a Constituent Assembly in December 1978 and thereafter for ethnic authorities - were organised by the South African authorities, involved a relatively small proportion of the total population, and, with only the partial exception of the 1978 election, were of little political significance. SWAPO, though never formally banned within the territory, nevertheless suffered severe repression, and only from 1986, thanks to some space opened by the advent of the TGNU and by the courts, was able to mobilise openly and hold public

meetings within the country. Given this repression, it was hardly possible for SWAPO to promote a democratic culture within the country, and very little was done in that direction.[19]

The SWAPO leadership in exile, on the other hand, could have made clear its commitment to a post-independence democracy and tried to act in a way compatible with that goal. That it did neither requires some explanation and elaboration. It is hardly convincing to argue - as its members have on occasion - that SWAPO in exile could not be democratic because of the war in which it was engaged with South Africa, and the vicious tactics used against it. Nor can it be claimed with much justification that it did not profess its adherence to democracy more strongly because it took it for granted, as the antithesis of authoritarian South African rule, and that it therefore did not need to proclaim it or elaborate on its meaning.

In considering the practices and professions of SWAPO in exile, it is now possible to draw upon the work of Leys and Saul, who show that it was organised, not on democratic but on extremely hierarchical and authoritarian lines, and who go on to argue that the leadership worked actively to suppress such democratic tendencies as emerged in the organisation in exile from time to time and in Namibia itself, fearing that such tendencies might pose a threat to its position. In 1975-6 a campaign within the organisation for the holding of a representative congress was met with harsh repression from the leadership.[20] A decade later, unhappy with the grass-roots mobilisation then taking place in Namibia, the leadership worked to discourage it.[21] And the anti-democratic culture in SWAPO made possible in the 1980s a massive security crisis, the so-called 'spy-drama', which led to the most heinous crimes being committed in the name of the organisation. Though some leading members did eventually come to decry what had been done, the most favourable estimation of the response would have to be that it was extremely muted.[22] Leys and Saul seem to suggest that the survival of neo-colonial socio-economic structures after independence was in part a result of the suppression of democracy in the movement before independence.

Nor did SWAPO in exile actively promote democracy through its pronouncements and statements of policy. In all the years prior to the actual implementation of UN Resolution 435, the only statements to spell out democratic ideas in any detail were drawn up in 1975 and 1976. Both were non-official documents, never circulated by the organisation. The first, a 'Discussion Document on the Constitution of an Independent Namibia', was drafted by Cedric Thornberry on behalf of SWAPO in 1975, and was clearly a bid for diplomatic support at a time when the Turnhalle conference was about to meet in Windhoek. It spoke of parliamentary

democracy, an executive president, a one or two chamber legislature, a comprehensive and entrenched bill of rights, and even of protection for property and the pension rights of public servants.[23] Though this document was presented to the Executive Committee of SWAPO in Lusaka, that body seems never to have responded to it.[24] The second document, the so-called National Programme drawn up in late 1976, spoke of the goal of popular and democratic government based on universal adult suffrage and complete freedoms, but did add that people 'guilty of betraying the struggle or those who have been opposed to it' would be deprived of voting rights.[25]

The main official document issued by SWAPO in exile, the one presented as party policy on numerous occasions in different fora,[26] was very different to these other two, and did not emphasise democratic values or goals. This was the Political Programme adopted by an enlarged Central Committee meeting in August 1976, the first and last such programme adopted by the movement in more than two decades in exile. Dobell interprets it as a 'calculated response to the challenges then facing the movement', the challenge of trying to gain recognition as a government-in-exile, of responding to the so-called 'Shipanga' crisis, and of a strategic realignment, towards the MPLA in Angola, then allowing SWAPO to establish itself in southern Angola, and towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries, the main suppliers of arms and material to the organisation.[27] The Political Programme was, according to Dobell, a highly pragmatic document. Whatever its purpose, however, it spoke of the aim of the struggle as being the building of 'a new democratic society based on the principles of socialism'.[28] While there was certainly ambiguities in the document, democracy was neither defined nor elaborated, and what was emphasised was, rather, social and economic transformation. The phrase that most readers of the document remembered, and the one most noticed by commentators and supporters alike, was 'scientific socialism'. For over a decade this document helped give the South African government ammunition to support its case that SWAPO was a radical Marxist organisation and therefore should not be allowed to come to power in Namibia. Not only was the radicalism of SWAPO's policy deplored by its critics; it was argued that, as so radical a programme would not be accepted peacefully by the people of Namibia, it would have to be imposed, and that could not possibly be done but by force, in an anti-democratic manner.

In the late 1980s SWAPO's policy shifted from 'scientific socialism' to acceptance of a mixed economy, and as it did so there was more talk of democracy and the protections of freedoms,[29] but in vague terms. The party's July 1989 Election Manifesto began to present in outline the political system it wished to see in place after independence, but it

left the door open to a one-party system, [30] and it was really only after the November 1989 election, when the Constituent Assembly met, that the details of SWAPO democratic vision emerged. It was then that SWAPO, at the first meeting of the Assembly on 21 November, proposed the adoption of the 1982 Constitutional Principles (to be discussed below) as the basis of the constitution, and it was only in subsequent debates in the Assembly that SWAPO's detailed political wishes were presented. These did not always find their way into the final constitution, for compromises were made with other parties to reach consensus on the overall package.[31]

Before the agreement to implement UN Resolution 435, reached at the end of 1988, prospects for a successful transition to democracy in Namibia did not look good. The long conflict, the history of authoritarian South African rule, the talk of a violent seizure of power, the behaviour of SWAPO in exile and its commitment to radical transformation rather than to a democratic vision, the fact that only a handful of Namibians in exile had any experience of living in a democratic country : these did not bode well for such a transition. Even when implementation began, there remained a strong possibility that the transition would be derailed. Yet in the event the transition to independence was remarkably smooth, and the basis was laid for a democratic future. Let us now turn to consider some of the reasons why this happened, focusing not on the reasons for the success of the transition to independence, which has been considered elsewhere,[32] but rather on what promoted democratisation.

3. ON THE ORIGINS OF NAMIBIAN DEMOCRACY

In Security Council Resolution 385 of December 1976 and other such statements, the UN made it clear that the future of Namibia should be determined, not by force of arms and a seizure of power, but by a democratic election for a Constituent Assembly, held under UN supervision and control. When negotiations began in 1977 between the Western Contact Group and the parties involved in the conflict - South Africa, SWAPO and the Frontline states - it was to achieve that goal of a democratic election leading to independence. The SWAPO leadership, deciding that a diplomatic strategy was more likely to win independence than the armed struggle, welcomed Resolution 385, and by July 1978 had been brought to accept, through pressure from both the Contact Group and the Frontline states, a set of Western proposals which spelt out the manner in which the democratic election was to be held. It was clearly the expectation of the Western countries that the very process of participating in such an election would help instil democratic practices in the participants, as indeed turned out to be the case. While some in SWAPO remained opposed to negotiations and to the compromises made in the negotiations, the organisation as

such committed itself to a diplomatic strategy to achieve power through negotations, which meant accepting the Western plan for a transition based on a democratic process, and one which therefore laid the basis for a future democracy.

The most important amendment and extension of the Western plan occurred in July 1982, when both South Africa and SWAPO accepted a set of so-called Constitutional Principles drawn up by the Contact Group. These Principles were not proposed to ensure a democratic future in Namibia, but rather to meet South African fears of the consequences of a SWAPO victory in a UN-monitored election. [33] The Principles were both a set of rules to govern the election of the Constituent Assembly, including a requirement that the Assembly would adopt the constitution as a whole by a two-thirds majority, and a list of substantive principles to be included in the constitution itself, some of them civil and political rights to be found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The 1982 Principles included many of the points in the 1975 non-official Swapo document already mentioned.[34]

SWAPO tried to resist the introduction of the Principles into the negotiations, and only agreed to accept them under strong pressure from the Presidents of the Frontline states.[35] After independence a leading SWAPO official argued that the Principles were 'the very basis of our struggle for equality and freedom, democracy and social justice', and that they were only opposed because they were designed to suit South Africa, the two-thirds requirement being 'a deliberate attempt to deny SWAPO a clear victory by raising the ceiling'. [36] It was difficult for SWAPO not to believe that it would gain two thirds of the vote in a free and fair election, and if it did the two thirds requirement would be of no significance.[37] Moreover, the Principles were not embodied in a UN resolution, for the fiction was upheld that Resolution 435 was not being amended. The question remained open, therefore, whether they were binding on the Constituent Assembly, and SWAPO did not commit itself to adhering to the Principles.[38] On the other hand, Swapo must also have known that if it did not obtain the two thirds majority in the election, it would be under enormous international pressure to adhere to the Principles. In the election - in which a remarkable 98% of registered voters cast their votes - it received only 57.3% of the vote. Concerned to get the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly over as quickly as possible, so as to move on to independence and to power, it quickly proposed at the opening session of the Assembly that the Principles be accepted, which they then were, unanimously.

The election campaign itself did much to promote the cause of democracy. A Code of Conduct, drawn up by the UN Special Representative, and monitored by UNTAG, committed the various parties participating to democratic practices,[39] and

it worked so successfully that Ahtisaari was to regard it as one of UNTAG's main achievements. [40] Ahtisaari interpreted the UNTAG role as including the creation of the right environment for the holding of a democratic election, and as a vital part of doing that UNTAG spent much time and energy on the spreading of information about the election throughout the country. [41] During the campaign, SWAPO was forced to some extent to defend its record, and it was drawn into negotiations with parties across the political spectrum. This at a time when there was much talk of the promotion of multi-party democracy elsewhere in Africa. The election itself, thanks to extensive and close UNTAG monitoring, went off with hardly any electoral irregularity of the kind which so marred the 1994 South African election. [42] The Berlin Wall fell as the Namibian election was held. In moving in a democratic direction, and accepting a pluralist form of democracy based on the rule of law and fundamental freedoms SWAPO was moving in the same direction of much of the rest of the world. It knew that it had to go that route if it were to attract the Western aid it sought, at a time when aid was no longer forthcoming from its former communist supporters, countries which were disappearing or in crisis. Without a two thirds majority, SWAPO knew that to govern in conditions of stability it had to compromise and could not afford to act dictatorially. It remained worried about threats of violence and destabilisation, which it sought to defuse by acting with caution and tact. All these considerations helped promote the establishment of the basis for democracy in Namibia after independence.

4. TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

It now seems almost inconceivable that there could have been any other outcome. The Western settlement plan meant a democratic election for a Constituent Assembly. If the Constitutional Principles were adhered to, the constitution that Assembly wrote had to be democratic. But had there been no implementation of Resolution 435, if implementation had been derailed, or if the Principles had been violated, the basis for Namibian democracy might not have been laid. It was, however, highly unlikely that after a UN-supervised election, a SWAPO-dominated Constituent Assembly would have written a non-democratic constitution. As it was, a successful election brought victory to a party which committed itself to national reconciliation, in the Constituent Assembly there was a remarkable spirit of give and take, and the result was a liberal democratic constitution. Had the new government attempted after independence to carry out its earlier policy of large-scale, radical social and economic transformation, the democratic experiment might have ended almost before it had begun. But on the other hand, if the government does not in the future show greater concern than it has since independence for popular involvement, accountability, and the creation of a

more just society through significant socio-economic reform, it is unlikely that the experiment will survive indefinitely.

Confidence about the future of democracy in Namibia would be greater had it deeper roots and emerged from an indigenous political tradition, or had the ruling party a longer history of democratic commitment. It has been the argument of this paper that the 'democratic transition' was largely the result of ideas and pressures coming from outside, rather than from within. [43] SWAPO wanted independence above all else, and though some of its members dreamt of using armed force to topple the South Africans from power, the leadership was realistic enough to know that the route to independence lay through a democratic election and accepting a democratic constitution. Though for long opposed to the implementation of UN Resolution 435 because of the likelihood that SWAPO would come to power as a result of a one person one vote UN-monitored election, the South African government had by December 1988 been persuaded to take a calculated risk, as part of a deal involving other matters, and allow such an election to take place. [44] The South African administration then sought to influence that election to ensure that SWAPO did not obtain two thirds of the vote, but was otherwise keen, in the interests of stability, to see a democratic outcome. [45] Now in the post-independence era the forces promoting future consolidation of democracy must largely be internal ones, though foreign aid and other forms of assistance may depend upon the continuation of 'good government'. The young Namibian democracy, therefore, remains fragile, especially without a vibrant civil society of the kind that exists in South Africa. [46] Yet so long as the democratic institutions born at independence survive, there will at least remain the possibility that in the course of time democratic values will take deeper root, and that a truly democratic culture, drawing upon popular commitment, will emerge to bolster and underpin the democratic framework of government. [47]

[1] Dirk Mudge, speaking in July 1992, quoted in H.Weiland and M.Braham, eds., The Namibian Peace Process: Implications and Lessons for the Future (Freiburg, 1994), p. 164.

[2] Colin Leys and John S.Saul, with contributions by Susan Brown, Philip Steenkamp, Sipho S.Maseko, Chris Tapscott and Lauren Dobell, Namibia's Liberation Struggle. The Two Edged Sword (London, 1994, forthcoming), pp. 4-5 and passim. Leys and Saul speak of an undemocratic outcome (p.5). I thank Lauren Dobell and James Currey for letting me see sections of this book in draft/proof.

[3] Just one example: D.Owen, Time to Declare (London, 1991), p. 378

[4] Cf., e.g., Leys and Saul, Liberation Struggle, p. 103.

[5] This is true despite the firebombing of the Namibian and government threats against it.

[6] Cf. C.Clapham, 'Democratisation in Africa: obstacles and prospects', Third World Quarterly, 14 (3) 1993, p. 425.

[7] Statement by Martti Ahtisaari, 14 November 1989: UNTAG Press Release.

[8] Clapham argues that the resurgence of democracy was not only a result of events in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union but also of crises in African states themselves: Clapham, 'Democratisation in Africa', esp. 423.

[9] C.Leys and J.Saul, 'Liberation without Democracy', Journal of Southern African Studies, March 1994, and their book cited in note 1 passim.

[10] P. Szasz, 'Creating the Namibian Constitution', in Wieland and Braham, Namibian Peace Process, p. 255. It preserved virtually the entire body of statutory law in force and maintained all public officials in office.

[11] Cf. e.g., Lionel Cliffe, with Ray Bush, Jenny Lindsay, Brian Mokopakgosi, Donna Pankhurst and Balefi Tsie, The Transition to Independence in Namibia (London, 1994), p. 6. For general discussion cf. S.Qadir, C.Clapham and B.Gills, 'Sustainable Democracy: Formalism vs Substance' , Third World Quarterly, 14 (3) 1993, where a minimalist/formalist definition of democracy is contrasted with a maximalist socioeconomic definition (p. 416) and formal democracy with 'deep democracy' (p. 422).

[12] L.Dobell, 'New Lamps for Old? The Evolution of Swapo's Philosophy of Development, 1960-1991', Queen's University, M.A. thesis, 1992, esp. p. 184. I thank Lauren Dobell for providing me with a copy of her thesis.

[13] ibid, pp. 191 ff.; L.Dobell, 'Swapo's First Congress', Southern African Report, 8 (1), May 1992.

[14] Cf. Dobell, 'New Lamps for Old' and her chapter in Leys and Saul, Liberation Struggle.

[15] The National Union of Namibian Workers and the press were the main critics of the secrecy over the constitutional negotiations: Cliffe et al, Transition to Independence, pp. 211, 213.

[16] Leys and Saul, Liberation Struggle, p.4.

[17] The most useful I have seen is Bill Lindeke's paper presented to the United States Political Science Association meeting, August 1993. I thank Bill Lindeke for showing me a copy of his paper.

[18] On the class structure see esp. the chapter by C.Tapscott in Leys and Saul, Liberation Struggle. There was an extremely small black professional class.

[19] In Gibeon in the south, Hendrik Witbooi, Swapo Vice-President, went a little way to encourage popular participation in local structures, but they remained extremely hierarchical ones. The churches were not democratic: Steenkamp in Leys and Saul, Liberation Struggle, p. 67.

[20] Leys and Saul, 'Liberation without Democracy', passim.

[21] Leys and Saul, Liberation Struggle, p. 14 and ch. 4.

[22] Ibid, esp. pp. 43-57. In trying to explain Swapo's anti-democratic culture, Leys and Saul mention the role of ethnicity; the undemocratic nature of pre-colonial Ovambo society and the respect of the leadership for traditional authority in that society; and the UN General Assembly's recognition (1976) of the organisation as 'the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people' (ibid, e.g. p. 15). Even had there been indigenous traditions of democracy in, say, pre-colonial Ovambo society, it is doubtful how significant they would have been in promoting democracy in the post-colonial state.

[23] Cf. Serfontein, Namibia? (London, 1976), p. 170.

[24] Dobell, 'New Lamps', p.44.

[25] Ibid, esp. 64, quoting National Programme.

[26] Eg. by SWAPO's then permanent observer at the UN, Theo Ben Gurirab, at the conference on 'Namibia 1884-1984', London, September 1984: B.Wood, ed., Namibia 1884-1984 (London, 1988), pp.8-9.

[27] Dobell, 'New Lamps', p. 58. Dobell argues that SWAPO's commitment to socialist principles was always opportunistic and pragmatic; this helps to explain, she argues, the rapidity with which socialism was ditched when Swapo took power.

[28] Quoted T.B.Gurirab, 'Namibia in the Context of Imperialism', in Wood, Namibia 1884-1988, p. 9.

[29] Cf. Dobell, 'New Lamps', pp. 114, 116 : statement by Nujoma to meeting with whites from Namiba, Stockholm, June 1988.

[30] Cf. the analysis in Dobell, 'New Lamps', p. 132. I assume a pluralist concept of democracy, which makes a one-party democracy a contradiction in terms.

[31] On the working of the Constituent Assembly, see, esp. Cliffe et al, Transition to Independence, ch.9.

[32] E.g. Cliffe et al, Transition to Independence.

[33] E.g. Weiland and Braham, Namibian Peace Process, p.23.

[34] Principles concerning the Constituent Assembly and the Constitution for an Independent Namibia, in letter dated 12 July 1982 from the representatives of Canada, France, Federal Republic of Germany, United Kingdom and United States of America to UN Secretary-General. The best legal discussion of them is M.Wiechers, 'Namibia: the 1982 Constitutional Principles and their legal significance', South African Yearbook of International Law, 15 (1989-90) and his chapter in in D. van Wyk et al, eds., Namibia. Constitutional and International Law Issues (Pretoria, 1991).

[35] It is odd that Ronald Dreyer, who generally stresses the role of the Frontline states in what he calls the 'regional dynamics of Namibian decolonisation', does not stress this particular key Frontline intervention: R. Dreyer, Namibia and Southern Africa (London, 1994), ch. 6. Nor are the Constitutional Principles given more than brief mention in Leys and Saul, Liberation Struggle (e.g. p. 197). Cliffe et al misleadingly suggest they were a UN initiative: Transition to Independence, p. 77 (but cf. p.199).

[36] Gurirab, quoted in Weiland and Braham, Namibian Peace Process, p. 49.

[37] Cf. Dobell, 'New Lamps for Old', p. 142, n.16, citing interviews.

[38] Dobell, 'New Lamps', p. 117. The influential pressure-group, NPP 435, wishing to see Resolution 435 implemented, was adamant that they were binding. But cf. Weichers, 'Constitutional Principles'.

[39] Code of Conduct for Political Parties during present election campaign, signed UNTAG headquarters, Windhoek, 12 September 1989.

[40] E.g. M.Ahtisaari, in Weiland and Braham, Namibian Peace Process, pp.69-70.

[41] Ibid, pp.67-69, 70-72.

[42] Cf. Cliffe et al, Transition to Independence, esp. p.133.

[43] This is not to deny the important role played by, say, NPP 435.

[44] On the reasons for the changes in South African policy see my forthcoming study, of which this paper is a byproduct.

[45] Cf. C.Saunders, 'The Transition in Namibia' in N.Etherington, ed., Peace, Politics and Violence in the New South Africa (Oxford, 1992).

[46] On the role of the churches and student politics see the chapters on those topics in Leys and Saul, Liberation Struggle; that book does not discuss the trade unions in any detail, in part because they are the subject of other research, notably by Gretchen Bauer of Wisconsin.

[47] One piece of evidence to support this: in an opinion survey of May 1989 the majority of Namibians favoured a one-party state; a second survey conducted in September 1991 revealed that only thirty percent favoured a one-party system: Weiland and Braham, Namibian Peace Process, p. 177.