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Praiseworthy values in President Hifikepunye Pohamba's epideictic speech marking Namibia's 20th anniversary of independence¹

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Abstract

This paper provides a rhetorical analysis of President Hifikepunye Pohamba's inaugural speech which he delivered when sworn in for his second term of office on 21 March 2010, the 20th anniversary of Namibia's Independence. In our analysis we unravel the praiseworthy values contained in the speech and we also look at the *unsaid or implied messages* which we label *subtleties*. By using carefully chosen words and phrases, Pohamba's speech promoted democracy, peace, unity, dignity, accountability, transparency, honesty, patriotism and the rule of law in a nation of diverse cultures. As is the practice in speech communication, Pohamba used Aristotle's three proofs of rhetoric, namely, pathos, ethos and logos in his ceremonial speech, to persuade the audience to identify with his goals. Identification and consubstantiality play a crucial role in rhetoric. Speakers employ identification and consubstantiality in their speeches in order to influence the audience to view things the way they (speakers) see them. We also demonstrate that a speech never comes in isolation or alone; the Speaker traced the past and present, and gave a glimpse of the future of the country. Throughout the speech we see a pious President who subscribes to the democratic value of turn-taking of the Presidency as he openly stated that this was his second and last term as President of the Republic of Namibia.

Introduction

Namibia can be described as an 'African Athens'² if we consider the flourishing democracy in a country that was ravaged by apartheid for decades in stark contrast to totalitarianism obtaining in some African countries where leaders' hold onto power for decades and ruthlessly crush voices of dissent. In his speech after being sworn as President for his second term of office on 21 March 2010, which was also the 20th celebration of Namibia's Independence, President Hifikepunye Pohamba made it clear to the audience that this was his "second and last term of office as President of [the] Republic", a rare statement

¹ This paper was presented at the 3rd International Biennial Conference of The African Association for Rhetoric which was held from 30 June 2011 to 2 July 2011 in Cape Town, South Africa.

² This term, an 'African Athens' is used to represent an ideal democracy, similar to the democracy in the Greek city of Athens. Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle championed democratic principles, most of which are in use today. The notion and practice of democracy dates back to 508 BC in Greece.

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some African Presidents would regard a topic as taboo. In this paper we explore President Pohamba's epideictic rhetoric focusing on the democratic values worth pursuing and some subtleties contained in the speech. But why worry about an epideictic or ceremonial speech? We attempt to answer this question bearing in mind Aristotle's view of epideixis: "the present is the most important; for all speakers praise or blame in regard to existing qualities, but they often make use of other things, both reminding [the audience] of the past and projecting the course of the future."³ Following rhetorical tradition, we demonstrate that in addition to highlighting values that promote unity, nation building and democracy, President Pohamba's speech took stock of the achievements of his democratic Government and focused on how he saw the ruling SWAPO Party steering the future of the nation as espoused in the Constitution of the Republic.

Rhetoric

In order to understand the analysis of the speech, it is important to explain what rhetoric is. There are many definitions or explanations of the term 'rhetoric', but we restrict ourselves here to only five to avoid a lot of repetition. We selected four definitions from a list provided on the following website: <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/english/courses/sites/lunsford/pages/defs.htm>. The fifth definition comes from Burke (1969). From the above-mentioned website, we selected definitions given by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian. According to Plato, rhetoric is "the art of winning the soul by discourse." The most quoted definition of rhetoric is that given by Aristotle. Aristotle says rhetoric is "the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion." Instead of defining rhetoric, Cicero identifies the five parts of rhetoric. To Cicero, "rhetoric is one great art [which comprises] ... five lesser arts: inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and pronunciatio." In addition to this, he says rhetoric is "speech designed to persuade." In the same vein, Quintilian, another great scholar in rhetoric, says "rhetoric is the art of speaking well." The fourth definition of rhetoric for the purposes of this paper is taken from Hauser. Hauser says that:

Rhetoric is an instrumental use of language... One person engages another person in an exchange of symbols to accomplish some goal. It is not communication for communication's sake. Rhetoric is communication that attempts to coordinate social action. For this reason, rhetorical communication is explicitly pragmatic. Its goal is to influence human choices on specific matters that require immediate attention.

The underlying purpose of rhetoric is persuasion. Those who use rhetoric use it to influence other people to follow their good or bad intentions. According to Burke (1969), the human being desires to be consubstantial with other beings and thus is ready and available to be influenced by the rhetoric of those who use rhetoric for whatever purposes. In other words, Burke contends that the individual human being does not feel safe to be in a state of isolation. The insecurity or separateness of the individual human being makes him or her want to identify with others. According to Burke, "a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests" (Burke, 1969, p. 46). His definition of rhetoric is: "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other agents" (Burke, 1969, p. 41). Relating the above definitions or explanations to the focus of this paper, we feel that they suffice to put into context the rhetoric in Pohamba's speech at this ceremonial occasion. By tracing Pohamba's praiseworthy values in his speech, we argue that the President was making them as rallying points for the

³ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1358a.

audience. He was leading the audience to identify with the values that foster unity, nation building, democracy and good citizenship.

Epideictic rhetoric

According to Aristotle there are three categories or regimes of rhetoric which are deliberative, forensic (judicial) and epideictic rhetoric. The term 'epideictic' comes from the Greek word 'epideixis' which means "appropriate discourse within pedagogical or ritual texts" (Sheard, 1996). Epideictic rhetoric, the concern of this paper, is also called ceremonial discourse. The aim of epideictic rhetoric is either to praise or blame. Some examples of epideictic rhetoric are obituaries, funeral speeches, speeches celebrating independence anniversaries, and nominating speeches at political conventions (especially as practiced in the United States of America), and graduation speeches. Osborn and Osborn (1994) define an epideictic speech as a speech of praise or blame, celebration or thanksgiving, condemnation or mourning. Most ceremonial speeches stress the sharing of identities and values that unite people into communities; this is what Pohamba did in his speech.

Salutation

The word salutation comes from the Latin word "salutare" which means "to greet". Salutation therefore refers to words and phrases that are used to open speeches and letters. Salutation forms an important part in speech communication. A classical example of salutation is found in William Shakespeare's play, Julius Caesar, in Mark Antony's speech when he is granted the permission by the conspirators to speak at Caesar's funeral. He starts his speech as follows: "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears." After catching the attention of the crowd by addressing them as "Friends, Romans and Countrymen", Mark Antony persuades the crowd to come to his side and leave the conspirators who had killed Caesar, his friend.

The lengths of salutations depend on the types of speeches and the occasions in which the speeches are delivered. The salutation in Pohamba's ceremonial speech consisted of twenty groups of people according to protocol or hierarchy. The common words and phrases used to address or greet the various groups of people included: "Director of Ceremonies", "Your Excellency", "Your Excellencies", "Honourable", "Leaders of Political parties", "Esteemed Chiefs", "Your Worship Mayor of Windhoek, "Esteemed Traditional and religious Leaders", "Distinguished Invited Guests", "Members of the Media", and "Fellow Namibians". The most important person mentioned after the Director of Ceremonies was the first President of Namibia and Pohamba's predecessor, addressed as "Your Excellency, Founding President and Father of the Namibian Nation, Comrade Dr Sam Shafiqhuna Nujoma." Besides following protocol, placing Nujoma on a high pedestal and referring to him repeatedly as the speech developed, helped Pohamba to keep the audience attentive, and also gave credence and reverence to this occasion because of the respect and honour most Namibians accord to Nujoma as a veteran liberation hero. Literally and figuratively, Nujoma's ethos became the pillar or base on which the success of Pohamba's speech rested. Nujoma is officially and affectionately called "Founding Father of the Nation" because of his ethos and contribution to the liberation of the country and his being the First President of independent Namibia. Character or ethos plays an important role in rhetoric. On ethos, Aristotle wrote: "... there is no proof [as] effective as that of the character" (Aristotle, 1886). Pohamba, appealing to Nujoma's good character said: "Allow me to express my deep gratitude to Dr Sam Shafiqhuna Nujoma, a legendary freedom fighter, Leader of the Revolution and Founding President of the Republic of Namibia for

⁴ Nujoma was sworn in as independent Namibia's first President on 21 March 1990. The National Assembly adopted a bill giving the title "Founding Father of Namibia" to President Nujoma in 2005 at the end of his period in office.

leading the way. I would also like to thank him for championing our cherished policy of National reconciliation. His achievements throughout his illustrious leadership should inspire all Namibians to emulate his selfless sacrifice and dedication to service. May his wisdom remain at the service of the nation, and may he enjoy continued good health for many years to come." After Nujoma, Joseph Kabila, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo and then Chairman of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), was mentioned. The presence of the SADC Chair at this gathering gave a sense of belonging and brotherhood of southern African nations that fulfills the Pan-Africanist philosophy of Kwame Nkrumah. The speaker went on to mention other Heads of State and Government whose presence at such celebrations gave credibility to the occasion and solidarity between the host and invited nations. Pohamba also acknowledged the presence of Dr Kenneth Kaunda, former President of Zambia, whose country bore the brunt of bombings from the white minority regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa, because he allowed his country to be used as a launch pad of black liberation struggles in Southern Africa. It can be noted that the act of inviting these dignitaries depicted the value of ubuntuism; if one has a celebration, one invites one's neighbours. If a neighbour has problems, one does his or her level best to offer assistance. That is the spirit of ubuntuism.

One other value worth noting in Pohamba's salutation was the spirit of tolerance and inclusiveness that the speech exuded. The mentioning of "Leaders of Political Parties" in his speech is noteworthy as this on its own promoted the value of treating the opposition parties as vital players in the public sphere, and not viewing them as impish leaders bent on reversing the gains of independence. This was in contrast to the besmirching of opposition leaders of some political parties by some Heads of State and Government who were present at the celebration. In hailing the "Leaders of Political Parties", Pohamba displayed his broadmindedness, which proved that he is an astute leader who promotes democracy and pluralism in the country, as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia. Pohamba displayed what Aristotle called "good advice, good sense, good moral character, and goodwill" (Roberts, 2010, p. 75). He showed his goodwill to the opposition parties and made them feel they were respected and welcome at this important national ceremony.

At the end of the salutation, the speaker mentioned "Fellow Namibians", both present at the celebration venue and those elsewhere in the country. The term "Fellow Namibians" implies treating one another as equals. Even the President himself was part of "Fellow Namibians". By using the term "Fellow Namibians", Pohamba bolstered the values of togetherness, egalitarianism and equality in the audience. The term was used to unite all Namibians regardless of race, tribe, political affiliation, status, colour or creed.

Exordium

The exordium of a speech is the introduction of the speech in which the speaker states the purpose of his speech. Using a short narrative, Pohamba started his main speech by saying "A short while ago, I was sworn in for my second and last term of office as President of the Republic." This statement indirectly shored up Pohamba as a leader who had accepted the democratic value of turn-taking of the Presidency, a leader who declared to the whole nation and the world that that was his "second and last inaugural statement" as President of Namibia. The subtle or unstated message to others was that one should leave the Presidency when one's term expires according to the Constitution.

The Speaker presented himself as a servant of the people by reminding them that he "promised to protect and defend the Namibian Constitution and to do justice to all". The President's promise to uphold the Constitution of the country is praiseworthy as the

Constitution has the value of uniting the people after a bitter struggle for independence. The reference to a "new dawn", a metaphor for the 20th independence anniversary of Namibia, is a symbol of hope, opportunity, stability, peace, and democracy. These were commonplaces or universal themes that were worth celebrating together as a nation. By using the metaphor "new dawn", Pohamba declared the purpose of his speech, that is, the celebration of the 20th independence anniversary of Namibia.

As a reminder, the President made reference to "the thousands of Namibians who sacrificed their lives and shed their precious blood during our struggle for freedom and national independence." The sacrifice of those who died for the freedom and independence of the country is recalled as a rallying point for the audience to encourage them not to betray the deceased comrades. We see the Speaker managing both the past and the present here by reminding his audience of the sons and daughters of Namibia who should always be remembered, for "their blood [still] waters our freedom." By using the hyperboles "their blood waters our freedom" and "[w]e crossed many rivers of blood", Pohamba succeeded in reminding the audience that it was not an easy walk to freedom, independence and social justice in Namibia. Since "their blood waters our freedom" is a line in the national anthem, he was also invoking the audience's national pride (See the Namibian National Anthem in the Appendix). Related to this, Pohamba also praised the sacrifice made by traditional leaders who were the fore-bearers of the liberation struggle. He said: "Today, we are free. We are a free and proud nation partly because of the contribution made by our traditional leaders in the struggle for national liberation." The audience was indirectly advised that it would be wrong to go against what all the mentioned patriots stood for. In other words, the subtle message was that people should be united and not betray the values of those who died during the liberation struggle for Namibia's independence. Again, the Speaker used the traditional leaders' ethos as a rallying point for the audience and the nation at large.

Virtue and praise

As far as praise and virtue are concerned, Aristotle asserted that objects of praise and blame are virtue and vice, and noble and base (Sheard, 1996). The forms of virtue on which praise and blame find their foundation are justice, courage, temperance, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence and wisdom (Roberts, 2007). The freedom fighters' sacrifice during the liberation of Namibia is a virtue of highest regard. The President, representing the nation, had the correct platform to pay special homage "to the sons and daughters, the heroes and heroines of Namibia who lost their lives during the ... struggle for liberty, democracy and freedom." Pohamba took advantage of the independence celebration ceremony to illuminate the noble acts of his deceased comrades-in-arms "whose sacrifices have not been in vain." Sacrifice is treated as a community value and community values are articulated through epideictic rhetoric, and the Speaker encouraged people to stick to such values.

It is worth noting that as countries emerge from gruesome wars or conflicts, reconciliation policies are put in place in order to build a united nation. Pohamba attributed the achievements scored by his Government, including the creation of "a society that is in harmony with itself", to the much treasured policy of national reconciliation which his predecessor, Nujoma, and he himself, have championed. Pohamba appealed to Nujoma's ethos again, describing him as a "legendary freedom fighter, a Leader of the Revolution and Founding President of the Republic of Namibia." He exhorted the audience to emulate Nujoma's selfless dedication to serve the people. By extolling Nujoma's virtues and expressing his deep appreciation and gratitude to Nujoma, Pohamba was asking

his audience to do the same. To Namibians, Nujoma remains an icon of the struggle for independence in Namibia, just as Nelson Mandela is for the struggle for freedom in South Africa, to the South Africans.

The ritual of taking an Oath of Office at the Independence Stadium, the same venue that Nujoma took his oath of office, is symbolic of freedom and liberty that united the people at the end of the war of liberation. Pohamba paid tribute to the voters by saying: "I accept your mandate with sincere gratitude and humility. ... It is a befitting tribute that I took Oath of Office here at the Independence Stadium, the same site at which the First President and Founding Father of the Nation, Dr Sam Nujoma took the Oath of Office twenty years ago, on 21 March 1990. On that historic day, a sovereign, secular, democratic and unitary Namibian State was born."

Another symbol that the President used besides the Independence Stadium was the national flag. The audience was reminded that it was victorious for Namibians to hoist the Namibian flag of freedom, independence and sovereignty and "lower the very last flag of apartheid colonialism." The collocates freedom, independence and sovereignty are commonplaces or universal values that were brought about by the sacrifices made by many heroes and heroines, both deceased and still living. Again, the audience was indirectly encouraged to act responsibly and not betray the sacrifices made by these patriots.

Together-words

To show that he and the audience shared the same beliefs and values, Pohamba invariably used together words: "we" and "our". Some examples are: "our beautiful country"; "our struggle for national independence"; "our great country"; "our citizens"; "our people"; "all of us"; "our nation"; "our Government"; and "our SWAPO Government". The constant use of "our" and "we" drew the audience in, to believe that they were part of the process of governance and not just passive participants. By using "we" and "our", the Speaker was emphasising the importance of the value of unity throughout his speech. He stressed that "just as unity was vital during the liberation struggle, it is still a very important element for the implementation of our common objectives." Standing united was the prerequisite for the achievement of common goals. To this end Pohamba reasoned: "We must rally together as one people with common destiny." The audience was encouraged to believe that it was a collective task and responsibility to develop the country.

Commonplaces

The Speaker rallied his audience around the commonplaces or community values of human development, dignity, peace, security, and stability and prosperity of the country. The words "peace", "security" and "stability" are used as collocates four times in the speech. By reference to these words, Pohamba was stressing that no meaningful development could take place without these values. All citizens were called upon to maintain peace, security and stability in the country. Closely related to peace, security and stability were the values of transparency, accountability, honesty and dignity, which the President referred to in his speech. Pohamba asked the audience to report cases of corruption to the Anti-Corruption Commission. This showed the goodwill of the President and his Government. He cited the antitheses of peace, security and stability, and transparency, accountability, honesty and dignity, as the vices of tribalism, regionalism, nepotism, ethnicity, racial discrimination, sexism and corruption. A picture was painted that if the citizens do not uphold the former values, there would be chaos in the country.

It was commendable for the President to tell the audience that "We must subscribe to the principles of the Rule of Law and good governance", in order to promote the best interests of the nation. It is important to stress here that the Government does follow the principles of the rule of law and good governance. Positive developments in Namibia are the direct opposite of the happenings in other African countries whose leaders often purport to be following the principles of the rule of law and good governance while they, in actual fact, practise bad governance. Is it not disheartening when the law is applied selectively in a country? Does it not bring civil strife when citizens' basic freedoms are curtailed? We don't have to provide answers to these rhetorical questions. We can only say we have seen and observed the rule of law and good governance in Namibia as described by Pohamba in his speech.

Vision 2030

The youth and those who were born free were saluted for exercising their right to vote in the 2009 elections. Pohamba promised his audience that the Government was committed to the social contract between the party and the Namibian people. He stressed the National Development Plans and Vision 2030, which are aimed at creating employment and improving the economy of the country. The President encouraged the private sector to have joint ventures with medium-size enterprises in order to increase their capacity for employment creation. The Speaker paid tribute to workers for their dedication and sweat, which he said has transformed the economy of the country. Women were singled out as having formed a pillar of the struggle for national liberation. In recognition of this, Pohamba said, it was imperative to promote the rights and interests of Namibian women; the country was indebted to women for their contribution to development. Not only women mattered, but also senior citizens and uniformed forces, he said. Above all, it was crucial to uphold the policy of reconciliation and national unity. The Speaker mentioned all this to make the audience feel as one community. In this speech the Speaker was an embodiment of the nation's values.

Conclusion

The analysis carried out in this paper reveals that a speech never comes in isolation or alone. Pohamba's ceremonial speech took the audience back to the liberation struggle, as well as to the present and the future. In doing this, the President emphasized common values of the community, values like development, dignity, peace, security, and stability of the country. The opposite or the antitheses of these values are the subtleties that are to be condemned as they bring disunity, insecurity and instability in the country. The audience was therefore goaded to uphold only the praiseworthy values that guarantee democracy and unity for all Namibians regardless of race, tribe, colour, creed or political affiliation. We conclude that Pohamba's epideictic speech had all the ingredients of a speech aimed at affecting the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of the audience. The Speaker created hope for a better future in the audience by his goodwill, good character and logical reasoning. To all intents and purposes, Pohamba used this epideictic speech as a tool of nation building.

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Appendix: Namibian National Anthem

Namibia land of the brave,
Freedom fight we have won
Glory to their bravery,
Whose blood waters our freedom.
We give our love and loyalty
Together in unity,
Contrasting beautiful Namibia,
Namibia our country.
Beloved land of savannahs
Hold high the banner of liberty.

CHORUS

Namibia our Country
Namibia Motherland
We love thee.

(Written by Axali Doeseb; Adopted in 1991.)