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## Reports

# Africa and the Arab World after Gaddafi

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Africa remains a continent of contradictions – where the poor and rich live in unsettled harmony and despots and democrats share advice at the grand union – and home to recurrent crisis. It has immense natural resources and potential but many African countries are unable to grow due to the pervasiveness of hopelessness and socio-economic decay as Odhiambo, et al. (1988) put it. Accordingly, Africa boasts the notoriety of being home to the world's most impoverished and abused people. Explaining the causes of problems revolves around old and common threads: the legacy of colonialism, neo-colonialism, culture, climate and bio-geographic factors. Also, the continent remains highly diverse demographically, ecologically, ethnically and culturally (Farjan, 2011) and encompasses 26 official languages and approximately 44 different currencies. At the state level, there are differential issues include tribal loyalties, linguistic variation, religious dissimilarity and, now, class conflict mediated by the ethnic camouflaging of individual wealth as group wealth.

Differences are seen globally in perceptions of African reality illustrated by a satellite photo of the world at night showing Africa as a dark continent in a world brightly lit up by electricity. However, this has various and largely historical connotations, often misleading and masking reality. Achille Mbembe, in his introductory chapter of *On the Post Colony* (2001), summarises these perceptions. On the one hand, Africa is seen as “a headless figure threatened with madness and quite innocent of any notion of centre, hierarchy, or stability, is portrayed as a dark cave where every benchmark and distinction come together in total confusion, and the rifts of a tragic and unhappy human history stand revealed: a mixture of the half created and the incomplete, strange signs, convulsive movements – in short, a bottomless abyss where everything is noise, yawning gap, and primordial chaos.”

Although Africa is full of contradictions – poverty in the midst of wealth, individual versus community – it remains one place where human nature is still real. This nature was exploited by slave traders, colonialists and competing religious groupings, Christianity and Islam. Although it did not remain a virgin after the brutality that has accompanied these encounters literally, Hegel's mythology of Africa as the land of childhood remains. The twenty-first century African embodies the sophistication and long brutal history of subjugation.

Although these perceptions are not new, they conceal African reality and tragedy. They reflect the long held view of the African as a child living in a continent of want and scarcity amidst plenty characterized by poverty, disease, corruption, political instability, the lack of basic infrastructure and the unwillingness or inability of leaders to frame and execute policies that will enable sustainable human development (Smit, 2010). Many elites see these as self-induced challenges that will continue to ravage most parts of the continent despite the rich endowment of natural resources, at least before coming to power. The West is often quick to attribute to the African their dominant media of the progressive leaders only to discover they cannot enjoy the supper together. The narrative is the same for those with and without Western education, as exemplified by Mugabe.

The African has therefore become unsettled in his childhood psychology and less trusting of Western powers. However, with the emergence of a new middle class and business leaders with relatively good education, new dynamics are also emerging. Farjan (2011) adds that new elites educated mainly outside of Africa respect hard work and international excellence, and exert strong local influence. Interestingly, recent years have witnessed Gaddafi's attempts to connect with the continent's various segments from the elite business community to despotic unaccountable tribal chiefs (some of which being actual conmen and criminals) and presidents. He used the immense

oil wealth of his country to establish oil relationships. Still, his actions remained contradictory and confusing even to his admirers. This perhaps raised a little excitement among many Africans who knew very little of Gaddafi during his brutal leadership.

Gaddafi was not an exceptional case in Africa as it has continued to have the problem of leaders'

clinging to power. Many who rose to power with good intentions soon became corrupt as they tend to enrich themselves, their families and friends at the expense of the nation. In aims of remaining in power and protect their wealth, they silence those who threaten their authority. As one injustice leads to another, and as their friends become fewer, they become increasingly paranoid and oppressive (Smit, 2010). They desperately hold on to power in fear that if they lose control then they might also lose their fortunes, their freedom, and possibly even their lives.

### **Gaddafi's Relations with the Rest of Africa**

Late Colonel Gaddafi had an interesting relationship with Africa. It was just as contradictory as his reign was eventful and controversial. Many analysts posit that upon coming to power through the overthrow of King Idriss in 1969, Gaddafi the tribesman was a Pan-Arabist. Pan-Arab orientation influenced his activities and programmes including his support of the Arab will demonstrated by his involvement in conflicts with Israel and its Western allies (Odiogor, 2011). How successful he was in endearing himself to the Arab world, however, remains controversial and subject to debate.

In the course of his reign, Gaddafi evolved into a Pan-Africanist. Accordingly, he supported several liberation movements in Africa, and his involvement is demonstrated by the initiatives he catapulted in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its consequent transformation into the current African Union (Kron, 2011). These endeavors as well as his concept of a United States of Africa of which he would become the head of state portrayed him as a unique native African leader who would perhaps rescue the black continent from the contemporary elements of colonial imperialism. In many ways, Gaddafi was a major force in Africa's geopolitical set up (Smit, 2010). After his death, however, the AU is likely to face difficulty in terms of funding unless the continental body finds other sources quickly. Clearly, there will be many fronts on which the AU and Africa in general will live a period of soul searching in the post-Gaddafi era.

As several authors argue, despite criticism from within Africa and the West, Gaddafi established a relatively wider and stronger base of support within Africa. Anti-imperialists within Africa have formed a major bloc of sympathy for Gaddafi (Wekesa, 2011). This is because the late president was a menace to western nations that were as ambivalent in their relations with him as they were driven by their greed for his massive oil wealth. In this bid, Gaddafi appeared as a massive defender of African wealth and resources by the inconsiderate exploitation of the West. Nonetheless, in Libya, Gaddafi's administration grew into a dictatorial system that became unbearable to its natives. Consequently, he could manage neither his ego nor his foolhardiness as his attempts to resist the wave of revolution ignited by Mohammed Bouazizi, the 26-year old Tunisian (Islamonline, 2011) proved to be futile. African leaders will now be fearful over the real possibility of being dislodged from power by force should circumstances similar to the Arab Spring emerge in their countries.

It should be recalled that NATO intervened in Libya after Gaddafi sought to suppress demonstrations similar to those in Tunisia and Egypt. A good number of African leaders have often used the police and military to suppress similar demonstrations. Many African heads of state and politicians owed a debt of gratitude to Gaddafi. In his four-decade rule, Gaddafi vigorously supported revolutions in African countries, notably in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Fayed & Awad, 2011). In these two countries, Gaddafi's support is said to have been decisive in the downfall of white rule not only by providing financial resources but also by providing military provisions and training bases. Leaders such as Zuma and Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe felt it was their duty to defend and support their benefactor.

Interestingly, Gaddafi branded himself as a nationalist and supported the cause of Arab people. It is this kind of support that he extended to the African continent where the

oppressive regimes in southern Africa felt the impact of Gaddafism with his massive funding of liberation movements. In this attempt, he gained accolades and enjoyed support from Africans as well as part of the Arab community. Observably, his support and funding of non-state actors like the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and the African National Congress (ANC), among others was highly regarded by significant portions of the African populace (Kron, 2011).

All in all, Africans perceive Western powers as imperialists and unwarranted exploiters of their resources. This has been the case since independence. This reveals the general lack of approval of intensive African-Western associations. In many respects, this perception contributed to African support for Gaddafi even when his actions were ill-advised. Unfortunately, this is observable as far back as 1988 during the involvement of Libyan secret service agents in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, an American flight, over Lockerbie (Giovanni, 2011). The consequence was great tension as a result of sanctions imposed against Libya by the West.

Africa is a continent with contradictory political aspirations suffused with leaders like the late Gaddafi who was the chairman of African Union from 2009 to 2010. African leaders had conflicting attitudes toward Gaddafi's brand of politics. He fought hard to prove himself in African politics through massive investments in the African Development Bank in which Libya is a major shareholder. The level of his involvement in African politics was partly contributed to by his massive ventures in varied African nations. It has been noted that Gaddafi enjoyed great hospitality even from some of his fellow presidents in Africa. Several Africans admit to have developed sense of attraction to and admiration for Gaddafi's unique outfits, public glamour, and trendy style of international appearance. He was distinct from other African leaders had great contempt for the West which was immensely approved by anti-imperialists (Islamonline, 2011). He had huge investments in many African countries, which created a considerable employment opportunities and revenue to the countries. His decision to identify mostly with anti-imperialists and oppositions earned support from such factions. It is this character that brought about his sponsorship of internal strife in Chad, Liberia, Uganda and many other African countries; and in the process, he earned friends and foes.

Several authors such as Khalaf (2011) and Kron (2011) have highlighted the relationships Gaddafi had with Africans countries. Indeed, Khalaf (2011) posits that many Africans mourn Gaddafi as a hero who had helped many poor African countries contrary to the majority of Libyans who celebrated the death of 'Dictator' Muammar Gaddafi and the end of four decades of tyranny and despotism. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Libyan leader built mosques, hospitals and invested in telecommunication companies and so on. Additionally, he used his own money to sustain many of the mosques and hospitals he built in these countries. In Kampala, for example, he committed himself to paying the salaries for a mosque staff of twenty for the next 20 years. Over time, his efforts won him many African allies, and when the uprising against his 42-year rule began this year, the African Union (AU) took months to recognise the National Transitional Council (NTC) as the country's governing authority (Kron, 2011).

Gaddafi was full of drama in a continent where corrupt leaders appear too stiff and boring, perhaps worrying about their ill gotten wealth. In a basket full of pompous titles, he declared himself "the King of African Kings", no different from the bemusing titles of the Amin and Mobutu days in Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo. The titles connected Gaddafi to traditional chiefs and kings and built friendships with a few leaders as well as less influential figures. These antics put him in good stead with many Africans, thus being regarded as a hero even in death. In Zimbabwe, he supported President Robert Mugabe's liberation struggle against a white-minority regime that ended in 1980. Such actions would usually be regarded as supporting the fight against foreign interference in Africa's affairs. It is noted that even some Africans who did not support Gaddafi's rule were touched by the bloody videos taken before and after his death. In Africa, Gaddafi remains one of the greatest African leaders that influenced several generations.

Gaddafi was also fortunate. He led a country whose economy benefited greatly from oil revenues, which contributed practically to all export earnings and 30% of its GDP. Oil revenues combined with Africa's highest education index gave Libya the highest nominal GDP per capita in Africa. Thus, between 2000 and 2011, Libya recorded high growth rates with an estimated 10.6 percent growth of GDP in 2010, the highest of any state in Africa. In the process, he made attempts to transform the lives of his citizens. Entire populations living in mud-brick caravan towns were moved into modern homes with running water, electricity and satellite television. In the first fifteen years of his rule, the number of doctors per 1000 citizens became seven times more than they had been before, and the number of hospital beds tripled (Wekesa, 2011).

Furthermore, Gaddafi took up Marcus Garvey's concept of a United States of Africa and put it into action. The United States of Africa is a proposed name for the concept of a federation of some or all of the 55 sovereign states of Africa. He served as the 2009 Chairperson of the African Union (AU) and put the idea of a United States of Africa forward. He asserted that only a true pan-African state can provide stability and wealth to Africa. Other AU members also supported the proposed federation, believing that it could bring peace to a 'new' Africa.

### **Gaddafi's Death Was Mourned by Africans yet Celebrated by Arabs**

Gaddafi was seen in contradictory lights in the rest of Africa. For instance, in Libya, he was a dictator while in Africa he was a hero. This is what Odiogor (2011) calls a paradox. Yes, Gaddafi was considered a hero in some quarters of Africa while in others he was seen a meddler who contributed to dozens of coups in the black continent.

By the time he died, Gaddafi had joined Al Bashir of Sudan in the list of suspects wanted by the International Criminal Court. Gaddafi's charges included ordering the murder of civilians protesting against his 42 years of rule in what is now known as the Arab Spring. Like Zine El Abidine of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, he was toppled by opposition forces with the help of western powers after 42 years of one-man rule of the oil-producing North African state. The revolutions are threatening to several other Arab leaders including Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and many more. The rest of Africa seems to have been spared for now but events in Uganda in the recent past indicate that similar happenings may be in the horizon soon unless peoples' demands are addressed. Although the spring of Arab revolutions began as mass protests against iron fisted regimes, they later turned into military engagements. The case of Libya was made worse by the cronyism that became the leadership style of Gaddafi who appointed his close relatives to sensitive security positions in the government as a strategy to secure his despotic leadership (Giovanni, 2011).

Seeing his blood-soaked body on television, many Africans viewed his violent death as nothing more than another sad chapter in a long-running narrative of Western powers meddling in African affairs. To Arabs, the bloodied corpse of deposed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi will send a clear message to other Arab leaders who are battling to stay in power against the will of their people. In fact, in their eyes, he deserved nothing less as a leader who destroyed the lives of his people for decades before his demise.

In the Arab world, it is understandable that Gaddafi's four decades of rule of Libya was generally considered a period of denial in which they could not determine their future and destiny. The colonel lived in his own reality, ruling Libya like a business that belonged to his family, and subjecting it to the brutality of a delusional vision. Even after the fall of Tripoli during the uprisings, he was still convinced that Libyans remained on his side. He hence moved to his birthplace of Sirte and continued to resist, assuring his remaining supporters that victory was in sight. Many parallels can be drawn with him in this regard.

Media reports indicated that Libyans celebrated Gaddafi's demise as a despotic, autocrat and a supporter of terrorism. In addition, they saw Gaddafi as having squandered their resources in his desperate attempts to gain recognition in the rest of Africa thus

spending large portions of Libya's resources in building properties and investment that according to Arabs were a waste of resources. When he seized power from King Idris in 1969, he had big pan-Arabic ambitions. However, he was treated with suspicion by fellow Arab leaders particularly because of his "revolutionary" streak (Islamonline, 2011). Accordingly, from the 1980s onward, he diverted his attention away from the Arab world to sub-Saharan Africa. Pursuing this dream with passion and using Libya's immense petrodollars, he bankrolled the activities of the AU, established companies across the continent and brought together various monarchies and traditional leaders.

Gaddafi notably denied Libya democracy during the four decades of his reign. Even after his death, Libya's huge investments in African countries will be a potential source of conflict between the leaders of the National Transitional Council (NTC), Gaddafi's children and African countries. Libyans find the amount of terror a president would unleash on his own people unbelievable. During the revolution, the number of deaths spiraled to over 15,000, notwithstanding the already injured 45,000 people (Kron, 2011). His insistence on power created pure and simple genocide. People were holed up in their houses or in crowded uninhabitable hideouts wherever they managed to find shelter.

There are numerous occasions when Gaddafi's men forced their way into private dwellings wreaking havoc on the lives of unsuspecting families with insane shootings and indiscriminate rape. At times entire families were raped not excluding men and children. As Fayed and Awad (2011) report, the regime used imported mercenaries from other African countries including the Republican Guard of Chad in undertaking these murderously insane acts. It also brought mercenaries from as far as Colombia in Latin America. The acts were possible perhaps only because real power lied within the Gaddafi family.

As Busuttil (2011) and other authors rightly argue, Gaddafi's tyranny did not recognise citizens' freedom to protest. He was also a poor manager of the country's resources and so it is not surprising that in a nation where petrol was virtually free, its price skyrocketed from 20 cents a liter to about five dollars within a few months of protests. Essential commodities became more scarce and expensive. He killed citizens at will and denied them the right to fully enjoy the proceeds of their natural resource, oil, while he and his kinsmen amassed great wealth. Hence, the country's wealth and resources were his, just as is the case for many African leaders, and this is observable in his lavish and careless manner of spending while on international voyages. In addition, because the country became too large, he focused on his kinsmen, forgetting that the rest of the country had a right to resources as well.

Gaddafi's reign undermined the existence of the institutional framework of succession following his authoritarian or totalitarian governance. In Libya, it was considered a taboo to discuss succession plans during Gaddafi's reign. He regarded himself as a traditional ruler. This explains why he accepted and often demanded royal or chiefly treatment including accolades, appellations and the payment of homage (Smit, 2010). His pan-Africanist image literally turned him into a chief, demanding greetings by a retinue, drumming and traditional incantations all over Africa. These false notions reinforced his permanent incumbency syndrome, an antithesis of democratic leadership. As a dictator, Gaddafi abused his appointive powers of an executive.

Gaddafi gave powerful and strategic executive positions to his kin including sons and in-laws (Kanuma, 2011). This was in a bid to ensure maximum protection as he grew more paranoid. He also dominated law-making, controlled and embezzled the national purse, and supervised the huge national development program, corrupting the awarding of contracts (Busuttil, 2011). These overwhelming concentration of powers enabled him to establish and preside over a system of patronage in Libya. His egocentric nature is depicted when he proposed the United States of Africa of which he wanted to become the president. Libyans seemed to have greatly disapproved his lavish spending and ill-motivated projects in Africa and even overseas in his quest for self-supremacy (Khalaf, 2011). He basically spent the state's resources as though they were his own and ignored his citizens' security and welfare. He managed to completely destroy democratic

principles within Libya and there no elections were ever held as he had become the "eternal leader". Indeed, his death is a great relief to the Libyan populace.

## Why Gaddafi was Endeared by Africans

Raw ego led to the view of many Africans and their leaders of Gaddafi as a hero owing up to his fight against the NATO and NTC until death. In this perspective, he is seen as one who could not allow his nation be taken hostage by foreigners and opportunists. His death saddened Africans who looked up to him as a freedom fighter and perhaps the only one who could use his money and courage to stand up to western domination (Wekesa, 2011).

In addition, it is evident that Gaddafi's support for liberation movements across the African continent endeared him to many people including South Africa's hero, Nelson Mandela, whose grandson was named after Gaddafi. Some of Gaddafi's actions were useful in improving the situation of Africans. This includes his support of the South Africa's anti-apartheid movement, the overthrow of Idi Amin in Uganda and the peace-keeping mission in Somalia. This generally contributed to the African unity immensely and provided people with an opportunity to live (Islam online, 2011). After Mandela became South Africa's first black president in 1994, he rejected pressure from Western powers - including from former US President Bill Clinton - to sever ties with Colonel Gaddafi, who bankrolled his election campaign.

In Africa, many regarded him as a true nationalist. As Smit (2010) adds, many other people within Africa also admire his bullying tactics that certainly kept imperialists at bay. Debates on BBC, CNN and national stations reveal that many elites view Gaddafi's demise as a decisive blow to Africa's independence. They argue that it is likely to empower western imperialists to plunder Africa's natural resources.

According to other sources, it was Gaddafi, who offered all of Africa its first modern revolution, connecting the entire continent by telephone, television, radio broadcasting and several other technological applications such as telemedicine and distance teaching. Gaddafi's remarkable financing roles are notable in 1992 when 45 African countries established RASCOM (Regional African Satellite Communication Organization) so that Africa would have its own satellite and disentangle itself from the exorbitant communication costs charged by western companies (Wekesa, 2011). In such aspects, his generosity is viewed to have transformed the entire African continent. Additionally, his plans in pipeline for the African continent such as establishment of a common currency based on gold and dinar was a move welcomed by many Africans.

The late Gaddafi was regarded as one of the few African leaders who could stand up to Western nations and tell them overtly that they have treated Africa unfairly. Although these acts endeared Gaddafi to Africans, Arabs viewed them as hypocritical initiatives (Busuttill, 2011). This may explain why his first attempt to become a pan-Arabist flopped immensely. Consequently, he had to turn to pan-Africanism, which he spearheaded mainly to gain supreme power of the overall African state president. But as Odiogor (2011) presents it, this did not go far as reports of inhumane treatment, torture, and repatriation of Africans back in Libya filtered.

He was a Muslim and was more biased towards the Muslim community rather than that of the Christians. His bid to support Idi Amin during his reign of terror and dictatorship in Uganda attests to this. Similarly, as Kanuma (2011) argues, Gaddafi showed his hatred for Nigeria when he called it a big for nothing country and loudly blamed the Muslim populace of Nigeria for being weak as they were controlled by Christians.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the credit given to Gaddafi in Africa might be overrated in many respects. In a number of cases, his investments caused political tension as the Kenyan case revealed. The investment acquisition of a hotel that was a public entity was shrouded in

secrecy and smells of corruption. This points towards the benefits of plundering public resources which many Africans argue Gaddafi fought against particularly when it came to western imperialists. Many questions remain unanswered.

There was very little knowledge of what was taking place within Libya. The media had selective reports on Gaddafi's leadership at home and Africans did not fully know the man. He, therefore, dazzled us with his theatrics which in many cases amused Africans. Nevertheless, leaders could not expose Gaddafi for fear of support of coups in their countries. On the whole, we did not know Gaddafi.

Although many scholars and political commentators are quick to point out that future relations between Libya and other African countries will be complex, I believe it is too early to predict. Several political, economic and social factors will emerge and influence engagements between the countries. In addition, the new regime will need friends within Africa as well as from outside. Overall, the interests of the country will influence arrangements and Africa has several resources that Libya needs. As such, the next few years will clearly indicate new rules of engagement. For now, there will be a relative state of fluidity in relations.

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