SOUTH AFRICA’S ‘AFRICA RENAISSANCE’ PROJECT: BETWEEN RHETORIC AND PRACTICE

Samuel Augustine Umezurike
Department of Public Administration, University of Zululand

Olusola Ogunnubi
Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Zululand

Abstract

South Africa’s putative status in Africa as a regional and sub-regional hegemonic power is sometimes viewed from the prism of its exceptionalism and Afro-modernity. The study on which this article is based analyzed secondary data from print and electronic media to argue that although South Africa has shown mixed behavior in its foreign policy in Africa, neo-imperialism is not the most appropriate mode to conceptualize it. Contrary to the arguments of some studies that have unjustifiably placed South Africa’s continental diplomacy in Africa within the orbit of neo-imperialism or sub-imperialism, this paper argues that South African diplomacy in Africa is also captured within the orbit of its constitutional democracy. We argue that South Africa has collaborated with international capital to create unequal exchange between it and Africa. South Africa’s African Renaissance rhetoric appears more of a response to the world economic order it found itself in at the end of apartheid than the purported African revival it projects.

Keywords: African Renaissance, Afro-modernity, hegemony, neo-imperialism, South Africa

Contact: umezurikeS@unizulu.ac.za. The authors declare that he has no relevant or material financial interests that relate to the research described in this paper. Also, the authors declare that the submitted paper is their original work and that, upon publication, nothing contained in it will not constitute an infringement of any copyright. Paper received 21.08.2016. Approved 12.10.2016. This paper is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derives 3.0. License. This paper is published with Open Access at www.socioeconomica.info.
1. Introduction

South Africa’s putative status in Africa as a regional and sub-regional hegemonic power is sometimes viewed from the prism of its exceptionalism in terms of constitutional democracy. This has borne fruit in the Rainbow Nation’s entrepreneurship, especially in terms of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa and elsewhere and international good citizenship underlined by the morality inherent in its foreign policy on the continent due to the international stature of post-apartheid leaders (see Geldenhuys, 2010; Ogunnubi and Isike, 2015). Ndlovu (2010), Grix and Lee (2013) and Umezurike and Asuelime (2015) note that South Africa’s hosting of sports mega-events can be seen as a demonstration of public diplomacy to portray its soft power capability as well as a strategy to pursue its broader global interests. In like manner, South Africa has hosted major international conferences, capitalizing on its superb infrastructure inherited from the apartheid regime (Umezurike, 2015). Thus, most studies have described South African influence in Africa as neo-imperialism especially due to its hegemonic status expressed through business expansion in Africa and the stance it has taken against immigration from the continent. The study on which this article is based analyzed secondary data from print and electronic media to argue that although South Africa has shown mixed behavior in its foreign policy in Africa, neo-imperialism is not the most appropriate mode to conceptualize it. South Africa’s major aim in its African diplomacy has been to maintain its standing as a constitutional state or at best to demonstrate African solidarity in the name of the African Renaissance. Contrary to the arguments of some studies that have unjustifiably placed South Africa’s continental diplomacy in Africa within the orbit of neo-imperialism or sub-imperialism (Bond 2013), sometimes justifying this stance by pointing to the country’s aggressive business expansion in Africa and anti-immigration policies, this article argues that South African diplomacy in Africa is better captured within the orbit of constitutional democracy.

The article is organized into five sections. The introduction discusses the study’s objectives and the methodology used to conduct the research. Section two sets out the theoretical framework that supports or disapproves the arguments. Neo-imperialism was selected as the theory and the literature in this respect is extensively discussed, followed by a discussion on South Africa’s foreign policy in Africa. The third section provides a brief overview of South African morality embedded in its constitutionalism at international fora since the dawn of democracy in 1994. It argues that South African action and inaction on issues concerning Africa are not entirely underlined by neo-imperial ambitions but its desire and commitment to international good citizenship and the rule of law or best African solidarity. Section four examines the attributes of post-apartheid South African foreign policy in Africa; it is argued that it does not represent neo-imperialist ambitions. The final section provides a summary of the article and draws conclusions on South Africa’s ambitions in Africa.
2. Unpacking the Conceptual Trappings of Neo-imperialism

Studies in international relations have not reached consensus on a generally accepted definition of the concept of neo-imperialism. The best approach is to contrast different definitions with events in the international political economy. An extensive literature review was conducted on the concept of neo-imperialism. Kieh (2012) describes neo-imperialism as a notion that expresses the asymmetrical relationship of domination of a strong state over a weak state. It is problematic because of the unequal configuration of economic, military and political power among nations. The dominant power, called the ‘core’ uses its structural advantage to coerce the weaker state known as the ‘periphery’ to behave in a particular manner that benefits the former. By implication, this type of relationship implies that the leaders of former colonies do not have the required mental attitude to achieve complete political freedom that extends to economic freedom. Instead, the former colonies are economically colonized because these politically independent countries are unable to deliver their countries from economic domination by powerful states. Thus, in simple terms, neo-imperialism is a term that is used to explain the dominance of a weak state by a more powerful state in a relationship that is grossly unequal although without direct governance.

Kieh (2012) is of the view that neo-imperialism functions within a wide range of cultural, economic, political, military and social interactions between dominant and dominated states. For example, the dominant state offers economic and military aid to the weaker state which often enriches the ruling class in the latter state. This type of relationship exists between the developed capitalist West and developing countries, especially in Africa. Ayoola (2015) states that colonialism gave way to neo-imperialism. Kieh and Ayoola observe that the colonizers opted for neo-imperialism at a particular stage in history when the physical occupation of territories in the form of colonialism was no longer necessary. Therefore, neo-imperialism is an entirely new dimension, because military regimes are no longer the appropriate tool and sponsored civil wars are no longer the best way for core states to maintain control of periphery states. This new form is found in conditional democracy even if it is stage-managed; it guarantees stability for the easy exploitation of the neo-colonial state. The core state is usually economically powerful with a strong capital base which it deploys in its relationship with the periphery state that usually has a weak economy and a weak capital base. Lenin described imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism where capitalist development reached the stage of domination by monopolies and finance capital. Exporting capital was pre-eminent; the world was divided among international trusts and the biggest capitalist powers (see Lenin, 1917; Fuchs, 2010; Iwilade and Ewurum, 2009; Umezurike, 2015). South Africa is far from achieving Lenin’s five stages of imperialism in its relations with Africa since 1994 due to its internal limitations, especially high levels of poverty and the need for reconstruction after many years of underdevelopment of Black people.

Iwilade and Ewurum (2009) note that scholars such as Hobson and Lenin compared imperialism with colonialism and hoped that political independence would tear down the walls of
imperialism. Unfortunately, this was not the case. The end of colonialism and the eventual fall of the Berlin Wall did not see off imperialism in the international political economy. This is the main reason for the continuous existence of neo-imperialism. The former colonies remain economically dependent on the large capitalist countries, perpetuating the unequal relationship between developing and developed economies. For example, relations between the West and the African continent are characterized by unequal relations of exchange; while the West specializes in the production of finished goods which are sold at exorbitant rates, Africa produces primary goods which are sold at a cheaper rate. This is somewhat similar to the relations South Africa has established with the SADC sub-region and West Africa. For example, since establishing formal relations with Nigeria in 1994, South Africa has invested large amounts of capital in Nigeria, especially in telecommunications, the food chain, tourism, petrochemicals, and banking and other services. South African companies operating in Nigeria include MTN, Eskom Nigeria, South African Airways, Stanbic Merchant Bank Nigeria Ltd., Multichoice Nigeria/M-Net, Umgeni Water, Defresh Products Nigeria Ltd, South Africa-Nigeria Communications and Systems Ltd, Grinaker-LTA Construction Ltd, Protea Hotels, Critical Rescue International, Global Outdoor Semces, Oracle Airtime Sales, and Digital Satellite Television (Adebajo, 2007; Aremu, 2013; Mohammed, 2013; Ebegbulem, 2013).

Similarly, surveys on South African companies doing business in Ghana show coverage of a wide range of sectors, including mining, retail, insurance, transport, tourism, banking, telecommunications, construction, services, manufacturing, fishing, advertising, aviation, energy, multimedia communication, beverages and franchising (Games, 2003). Ghana offers incentives to foreign investors, including sound macroeconomic reforms to contain inflation, debt, poverty and unemployment; and the implementation of International Monetary Fund (IMF) programmes aimed at stable growth (Games, 2003). These and other factors such as cheap labour, a high level of education and thus skills and political and economic stability make Ghana attractive to South African investors. South African exports to Ghana rose from R21.7 billion in 1992 to R116.2 billion in 2003, while imports from the country increased from R4 billion to R52.5 billion in the same period (Games, 2003; SouthAfrica.info, 2014).

Fuchs (2010) argues that, while media imperialism or information imperialism are integral components of the new form of imperialism, they are subsumed under finance capital. Media and information are used to legitimize global capital exports through propaganda and the spread of information which supports imperial behavior. Fuchs (2010) notes that fossil fuel has continued to be a pre-cursor of imperial warfare and confrontation. Interestingly, in Africa, South Africa has the capability for both media and information imperialism especially through its multinational companies that operate in telecommunications and media industries on the continent and elsewhere. Examples include MTN and DSTV’s roles in African transnational capital and markets. Iwilade and Ewurum (2009) locate imperial dominance in the nature of the economic relations between people. They contend that other manifestations of imperialism are mere rationalizations that are designed to disguise the economic motivations that drive societies towards empire. The politics of dominance and dependency have arisen out of the experience of the exploited classes
in the developed world and that of the dominated people of the ‘Third World’ in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This world view was well-presented by classic Marxist-Leninist writings on the character and implications of monopoly capitalism and imperialism (Iwilade & Ewurum, 2009). It is also a reflection of the experience of contemporary developing countries in the international system crafted and stage-managed by the Western capitalist political economy. South Africa’s ability to invest outside the country and to attract investors is a sure recipe for the country’s economic wellbeing. It has been a gateway for foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa since democratization (Draper and Scholvin, 2013; Sega and Lekaba, 2014). Bond (2013) notes that the parent companies of most multi-national companies with headquarters in Johannesburg that do business in Africa are based in Europe, Australia, America and Japan. This perhaps is a marked indication of South Africa’s position as a front for international capital flight from Africa.

A good example is South Africa’s intra-trade relations with Nigeria which are reflected in the latter’s newly calculated GDP. While the South African trade balance with Nigeria is in deficit, this is because the calculation excludes capital exports where South Africa has an advantage. If the calculation were to include capital exports, South Africa would show a trade surplus and advantage over Nigeria.

Galtung (1971) contends that, although the world consists of core and periphery nations, each nation has its own centre and periphery. He adds that imperialism is a special type of relationship between nations which relies on a bridgehead which the centre in the core nation establishes in the centre of the periphery nation. For Galtung, the dominant relationship can only be described as imperialism when it is established in a special way, where it has a subtype. Conflicts of interest or disharmony may occur when there is a gap between the living conditions of the dominant and the dominated. Imperialism ensures that there is less inequality at the centre than on the periphery. The study identified five types of imperialism: economic, political, military, communication and cultural. These types of imperialism occur in phases which Galtung termed colonialism, neo-colonialism and neo-neo-colonialism. This situation is comparable to South Africa’s efforts to reduce inequality and poverty which now largely depend on its ability to create wealth from the external environment, mainly through FDI.

Iwilade and Ewurum (2009) argue that the overall structure of relations where political actions occur and the mechanisms by which the structural dominance of some groups is consolidated to the disadvantage of others is the best mode to capture and understand imperialism. In Africa, South Africa has gained the advantage, especially in the transnational export of capital for investment. This also explains the relationship between the developed capitalist West and Africa. America and Europe are the core centres with Africa as the periphery, even after political independence. On the other hand, Robinson (2007) refers to USA imperialism as the use of the transnational rich class and state machinery to increase, protect and establish the world capitalist mode, mainly in the national interest. The world has witnessed new modes of world capitalist domination where intervention creates the necessary conditions for the entrance of global capital. While the targeted regions are reintegrated into the current global political economy, this is often to their disadvantage.
Robinson (2007) argues that US intervention shifts power from the rich at local and regional levels to a new bourgeoisie that supports the interventionists’ transnational projects. Hence, the outcome of US military invasion is not the creation of a militarized global structure or a campaign for hegemony, but more likely a confused political reaction to the crises of world capitalism – economic stagnation, legitimization problems, and the rise of counter-hegemonic forces. For example; the $300 billion invested by the US in the first three years of the occupation of Iraq is a clear illustration of how US intervention creates an advantage for American capital at the expense of other states and regions where it intervenes (Robinson, 2007). The interests of military, oil, engineering and construction companies with head offices in the USA have been promoted by means of the instrumentalization of the US state apparatus, especially under the presidencies of Bush Senior and Junior. However, these companies remain transnational and represent global capital; evidence of the forces of globalization. Robinson (2007) warns that war, and natural and humanitarian disasters give rise to new cycles of accumulation through reconstruction and that the military-energy-engineering-construction complex is the global capital sector that benefits the most from such creative destruction. Believably, global capitalists appreciate the vital role the US plays in opening up new opportunities for the extraction of surplus value through the creation of new avenues for capital exports by its interventionist policies (Robinson, 2007). While it is doubtful whether South Africa has the capacity to match the sway that the US holds in the global arena in Africa, it is argued that its capitalist tendencies enabled its investors to benefit from the crises in Angola, Zimbabwe, and DRC because of the role these companies played in those countries during the crises and political turmoil.

3. South Africa’s Capital Project in Africa: The Rhetoric of Practice

South Africa’s collaboration with global capital to create unequal exchange between it and Africa raises fundamental questions about its commitments to African Renaissance. South Africa’s African Renaissance rhetoric appears more of a response to the world economic order it found itself in at the end of apartheid rather than the purported African revival it projects. While the country does not have the capacity to create a military monopoly of destruction of the kind the US has paraded around the world, it has shifted its strategy to those areas where it does have such capacity. South Africa’s ability to increase its capital base and investment in war torn African countries and those that experience political crises has been notable. Examples include Sudan, DRC, Angola, and Zimbabwe where South African companies have conducted both covert and overt operations.

During the first term of the democratic government, South Africa’s foreign policy mainly followed the moral behavior and public statements of anti-apartheid icon, President Nelson Mandela. Under President Thabo Mbeki, foreign policy was marked by his skills as an experienced diplomat and international statesman (Le Pere, 2004). Mbeki was a major proponent of Marxist-Leninist theory but the use of this philosophy was limited to presenting a critical view of a global
world order dominated and controlled by the West. Mbeki also did well for South Africa in propagating African Renaissance rhetoric to create solid ground for business growth in Africa and beyond. Simply put, South African business witnessed its greatest opportunities and smoothest growth during Mbeki’s days in office, especially in terms of South-South and even South-North relations. For instance, in 2008, South Africa was the largest foreign investor (US$ 136 million) in Mozambique, ahead of China (US$76.8 million) (Njal 2011).

For example, many South African companies now operate in Sudan due to Mbeki’s diplomatic and peace efforts in that country. The Global Railway Engineering Consortium of South Africa concluded a US$21 million contract with the Sudanese Railway Corporation for the rehabilitation of railways and rolling stock on 9 December 2004 (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2005). Funding was granted by Rand Merchant Bank, which is indirectly or directly a South African loan. In May 2004 SOEKOR and PETROSA entered into an agreement with the Sudanese state oil company, SUDAPET for special oil concession rights for Block 14 (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2005; Nathoo, 2005). PETROSA signed an agreement to train and develop technical staff in Sudan. South African exports to Sudan include finished goods such as base metals, machinery, vehicles, wood pulp, plastics and chemicals while imports from Sudan include mainly primary goods such as vegetables, animal fats and petroleum products (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2005; Nathoo, 2005). This represents a major division of labour between the two countries into skilled and unskilled.

Scholars express divergent views on whether South Africa employs economic statecraft to its benefit. Some are of the opinion that such statecraft does not exist, while others maintain that it has the covert intention of manipulating and serving South African business interests wherein it stands to gain with the expropriation of foreign capital to South Africa (Eldredge, 2010; McKinley in SAIIA, 2014). A close examination of South Africa’s involvement from the perspective of Zimbabwean immigration to South Africa might appear costly in socio-political and economic terms. This is especially so as South Africa has continued to ignore the positive aspects of immigration. Many Zimbabwean immigrants have skills that are in short supply in South Africa and the country could benefit from their expertise.

Helliker and Vale (2013) note that, while Marxism was a fundamental tenet of South Africa’s liberation struggle, post-apartheid leaders chose neo-liberalism over Marxism. South Africa had grounds to believe that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the neo-liberal economies that dominated the world offered pertinent lessons. Post-apartheid South Africa adopted neo-neo-liberal policies while paying lip service to social democratic development with a view to redressing the historical legacy of inequality and social injustice (Helliker and Vale, 2012; 2013). In reality, the country has snubbed Marxism in its economic practice since 1994. However, this is not sufficient grounds to suggest, as many have argued, that South Africa has consolidated its position as a neo-imperialist or sub-imperialist state in Africa.

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1 The loan is a direct loan of South Africa if the state has stake through direct investment, but is indirect if the state does not have direct involvement but its conglomerates have.
Steinmetz (2005) identifies various types of empires. He contrasts territorial with non-territorial types of modern empire that continue, however, to rest on colonialism and imperialism. He argues that territorial and non-territorial approaches have never been pure but have been mixed both in terms of both timing and in the repertoire of particular metropolitan states (Steinmetz, 2005). South Africa could belong to the latter (non-territorial empire) imperialism, although there is doubt that it has the capacity to be an empire or an imperial power. It could be on the road to becoming an empire in terms of business expansion in Africa. There can be no doubt that South African multinationals play a pivotal role in the economic and even the political activities of southern Africa, as much of the region’s capital flows from South Africa (Miller, 2008). The country has remained the major beneficiary of regional economic cooperation among southern African countries as virtually all economic sectors ranging from mining, to customs, retail, communication and transportation are concentrated in the hands of South African companies (see Alden and Soko, 2005; Miller, 2008).

As Miller (2008) argues, the role of South African companies in the capitalization of the Southern African economy cannot be over emphasized, but it is not without consequences. For example, the continued growth of a South African retail company (Shoprite) in Zambia created rivalry between the company and local vegetable producers who responded aggressively by threatening to burn down the store in response to the deprivation the company’s presence had caused them. Miller notes that the Partnership Forum established between Shoprite and local citizens could reflect the global neo-liberal shift towards partnerships and cooperation among contending social forces. This notion is supported by the World Bank, the IMF and other interest groups. African countries embraced neo-liberal economic and political reforms in the 1990s which coincided with a major political change in South Africa and opened up African economies to the country’s multinational companies (Miller, 2008). The above-mentioned partnership in Zambia ended the tension between Shoprite and local communities because the former easily triumphed over the unorganized villagers. For South African companies operating in Africa, the progress of organized groups continues at the expense of disorganized peasants. Miller argues that despite a renaissance of local organizations in Zambia, this could not protect them from eventual exploitation at the hands of organized giant retail companies such as MTN. Thus, South African neo-imperialism takes the form of transnational multi-national companies supported by the state apparatus to expand, defend and stabilize the global capitalist system in Africa.

Africa is witnessing a new form of global capitalist domination where South African companies penetrate African markets using transnational capital accompanied by the rhetoric of African Renaissance spearheaded by state policy makers. This has almost succeeded in hiding the country’s true interests in the form of expanded trade and investment in Africa. As such, the African Renaissance has become a symbolic campaign for hegemonic power and the subtle legitimization of South African business expansion in Africa. To all intents and purposes, South Africa has thus completed all of Lenin’s five stages of imperialism as the highest form of
capitalism barring one; territorial division and occupation in Africa which it lacks capacity to achieve.

4. On Morality Vs Constitutionalism?

Is South Africa’s African Renaissance rhetoric more of a response to the world economic order it found itself in at the end of apartheid than the purported African revival? South Africa does not have the capacity to create a military monopoly of destruction of the kind the US has created, but has shifted its strategy to the areas where it has capacity. Good examples of South Africa’s African Renaissance successes include sporting diplomacy on the continent, especially assistance to Mali for its hosting of the Africa Cup of Nations in 2002. South Africa provided significant aid to Mali including human resources, finance, technical skills, communication facilities and transport (Ndlovu, 2010). CAF acknowledged South Africa’s help as crucial in the successful hosting of the tournament when at the eleventh hour, it seemed that the competition would not take place (Ndlovu, 2010). South Africa extended the same assistance to Ghana when it hosted the African Cup of Nations in 2008 though on a smaller scale. In the same vein, South Africa through the National Oil Company (NOC) PetroSA bankrolled the successful hosting of the All Africa Games in 2011 by Mozambique when it was clear the latter’s capacity to host the competition was in doubt (Petro SA 2011; Ogunnubi 2014).

South Africa has used its solid private sector to finance and ideologically support sport in Africa including its hosting of the 1995 Rugby World Cup, the 1996 African Cup of Nations, the 2003 Cricket World Cup co-hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, and the 2010 FIFA World Cup. South Africa also hosted the 2013 African Cup of Nations because Libya who won the hosting rights could not do so due to the outbreak of civil war and NATO’s intervention in that country. It stepped in to host the African Cup of Nations in 1996 when Kenya that won the hosting rights was cash trapped. However, in 2014 when West Africa was stricken with Ebola, Morocco who won the hosting rights declined the honor, and South Africa did not offer its services, citing budget challenges. It is instructive that, in this case, the national interest superseded the African Renaissance project because South Africa’s calculations were based on fear of the spread of the Ebola virus in the country and losses in terms of the cost of hosting the event. South Africa has the most sophisticated medical facilities in Africa and the most developed capitalist economy. It should have stepped in to salvage the tournament in the spirit of the African Renaissance.

Mega South African companies involved in sports sponsorship in Africa include MTN, PetroSA, Standard Bank, and Multichoice/Supersport, among others. Government and private sector partnerships in this regard include SABMiller working with SAFA, provincial governments and the National Department of Sport and Recreation to sponsor competitions of the regional Confederation of Southern African Football Associations (COSAFA), including youth and women’s competitions (Ndlovu, 2010). South Africa’s most exciting contribution to the African Renaissance movement was undoubtedly bringing the FIFA World Cup to Africa for the first time in 2010 and its claims of hosting on behalf of Africa. No other project has done more to bring
Africans together since the end of colonialism and apartheid, even though its glitter has been tarnished in recent times by allegations of bribery. These are some reflections of the country’s soft power capabilities which it deploys to advance both its hegemonic aspirations and economic interests in Africa (Ogunnubi and Isike, 2015).

At the beginning of democratic era, South Africa’s foreign policy was underlined by the principles of its liberation struggle and international good citizenship (Fairbanks, 2012). The apartheid struggle was a global one; thus, South Africa would assume international responsibility for the good citizenship that justified that struggle. However, this commitment has been diluted over the years. For example, in 1996, Nelson Mandela welcomed the spiritual leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama to the South African Parliament. Fifteen years later, the government has, on many instances refused to grant the Dalai Lama a visa to attend Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu’s birthday party in Cape Town.

In the same manner, South Africa has sometimes found itself at serious odds with African countries. For example, in the Zimbabwean crisis, the country maintained the quiet diplomacy which President Mbeki opted for during his time of mediation. In the feud over yellow fever with Nigeria, South Africa realized that a diplomatic crisis would not be beneficial; business interests in Nigeria dictated the need for a hasty apology (Umezurike and Asuelime, 2015). The same strategy of withdrawal was followed when South Africa opposed the human rights abuses of the military junta of late General Sani Abacha and the hanging of the Ogoni 9 including environmental activist, Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995 (Banjo & Omidiran, 2000; Adebajo, 2007; Banjo, 2010). However, we argue that such foreign policy choices in Africa or elsewhere do not qualify South Africa as a neo-imperialist outpost on the continent even if such choices are motivated by the state’s business interests. At most, South Africa’s choice is anti-West or international good citizenship which often reflects its internal constitutional democracy and the moral stature of its post-apartheid leaders such as Mandela and Mbeki.

In 2007, South Africa voted against a United Nations resolution calling on Myanmar's military junta to put an end to human rights abuses. It did the same in 2008, when the country was instrumental in thwarting a UN resolution to impose sanctions on neighboring Zimbabwe despite the fact that the US ambassador rightly pointed out that similar sanctions were instrumental in the liberation of South Africa from apartheid (Fairbanks, 2012). South Africa has failed on a number of occasions to respond appropriately to rogue regimes. For example, having at first supported the UN resolution mandating a no-fly zone to support Libyan rebels fighting Col. Muammar al-Qaddafi, South Africa condemned the subsequent NATO bombing campaign, baulked at releasing $1.5 billion in assets to the rebels, and complained about the unceremonious way Qaddafi was chased out of Tripoli and eventually killed (Fairbanks, 2012). Fairbanks recounts that President Jacob Zuma himself flew to Tripoli in May and expressed sympathy after the bombing claimed the lives of Qaddafi’s family members. The view of many is that South Africa's impact on global affairs is very much the tale of a determined growing economy taking precedence over gauzy ideals that are sometimes not practicable. Few articles about the Dalai Lama saga (the second time in two years South Africa refused to grant him a visa) noted that it coincided with the South African
Deputy President's trip to Beijing to announce a $2.5 billion investment deal with China (Fairbanks, 2012).

In the days of apartheid, South Africa had close relations with Taiwan because both countries were facing near isolation in global affairs; in the case of South Africa, this was due to the official policy of racial segregation while China claimed that Taiwan is an integral part of China. The situation became tougher for Taiwan in the 1970s when UN Security Council withdrew its resolution supporting Taiwanese independence and accepted China’s position (Grimm et al., 2014). As pariah states, South Africa and Taiwan enjoyed a successful relationship until the 1990s when the former gained freedom and established popular rule. China and Taiwan then entered the race to maintain diplomatic ties with South Africa. China made it clear that it would not tolerate South Africa retaining diplomatic ties with Taiwan although it might accept other forms of relations with Taiwan as long as Taiwan does not lay claim to sovereignty of any kind (Grimm et al., 2014). South African chose to sever diplomatic ties with Taiwan (Schraeder, 2001). The pragmatic South Africa has chosen China that does not share the same ideology over Taiwan that has the same capitalist views. This demonstrates that South Africa is a realist state that makes choices in light of national and economic interests.

5. Post-Apartheid South Africa: a Symbolic Hegemon

ATTRIBUTES OF POST-APARTHIED SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY IN AFRICA

Academics, the media, diplomats and analysts alike have situated the influence of post-apartheid South Africa in Africa and in global affairs in a number of contexts, including as a middle power, emerging power, emerging middle power, pivotal state, regional power, regional hegemon, secondary power, regional hegemonic power, sub-imperialist, capitalist, imperialist neo-imperialist, soft power, leadership and representivity (see Sidiropoulus and Hughes, 2004; Flemes 2007, 2009; Ahwireng-Obeng and McGowan 1998; Habib 2009; Bond, 2013; Tella and Oggunubi, 2014; Sidiropoulos 2014; Umezurike and Asuelime, 2015; Alden and Schoeman, 2015; Oggunubi and Isike, 2015). All these attributes have been cited to support the simplistic assumption that South Africa is a neo-imperialist power in Africa. The claim made in this paper aligns with Oggunubi and Isike’s (2015) assertion that South Africa has large attributes of soft power especially in the African context. It is these soft power attributes that have enabled the country to consolidate its comparative advantages in relations with African countries that are often perceived as neo-imperialist or sub-imperialist. Thus, Oggunubi and Isike (2015) and Tella and Oggunubi (2014) acknowledge South Africa’s symbolic hegemonic status rooted in the formal and informal sources of soft power, including its media exports, political ideology, constitutionalism/rule of law and respect for the Bill of Rights enshrined in its constitution, its vast array of iconic personalities which generates positive political goodwill; world-class multinational companies and universities, cultural exports, sporting attractions, and a world-class hospitality industry, among many others. At the end of apartheid, the free South Africa sought to shift its mode of production to a world-class dynamic mode (neo-liberalism), which included engaging in many strategic policies
including privatizing public enterprises, encouraging private corporate investment, reducing tariffs and export subsidies, liberalization of exchange controls, tax cuts on corporate dividends, and enforcing intellectual property rights (Edwards, 2001; Kabundi, 2009; Saayman, 2010; Thaver, and Ekanayake, 2010; Umezurike; 2015). This earned it the title of a world-class capitalist economy. As such, many are of the view that South Africa is a gateway to the rest of Africa, especially with regard to FDI although China and India have practically demonstrated that South Africa is not necessarily the gateway to the African market (Alden and Schoeman, 2013, 2015). While South Africa has an advantage over other African economies in this regard, many other countries on the continent such as Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Angola, and DRC have the necessary leverage to act as such a gateway. For example, despite not fully reaching its socio-political and economic potential, Nigeria has overtaken South Africa as the biggest economy in Africa.

South Africa has also become the South-South voice and Africa’s lone voice at multilateral fora especially the G8 and the World Trade Organization. The country is also a member of the G20 and BRICS (Fairbanks, 2012; Bond, 2013; Alden and Schoeman, 2013, 2015; Games, 2013; Ogunnubi and Isike, 2015; Umezurike, 2015). It has gained leverage through its anti-imperialist rhetoric which in turn helps it to gain access to developed Western and South-South economies.

Overall, South Africa’s economic influence is more pragmatic and visible when viewed from the spread of South African multi-national companies such as retail chains PEP stores, Game and Shoprite, telecommunications giant MTN, digital satellite television (DSTV) and Standard Bank in the banking sector (Dakora et al., 2010; Games, 2013; Sega and Lekaba, 2014; Ogunnubi and Isike, 2015; Alden and Schoeman, 2015; Umezurike 2015). Inferably so, South Africa undoubtedly possesses soft power in economics, commerce/trade and political diplomacy with regard to its relations in Africa. The country’s soft power through converting traditional hard power competences in its economic strength have accrued great benefits and underlined South Africa’s credibility as the African powerhouse; this has been interpreted by many as neo-imperialism on the part of South Africa.

6. Conclusion

In the analysis offered in this paper, we have presented arguments that demonstrate a schizophrenic foreign policy posture of South Africa in its African Renaissance project. On the one hand, South Africa has collaborated with proxies of international capital to create unequal exchange between it and Africa while on the other, it is keen to present itself as a model of African progressive advancement towards modernization and industrialization. Therefore, South Africa’s African Renaissance claim of African revival partly mirrors a rhetorical response to the world economic order as well as a subtle moral campaign for facilitating its neo-imperialist expansion into Africa. Therefore, realistically and viewed from the perspective of the internationalization of capital, and the character and geo-political configuration of the South African state, the trajectory
of economic openness and stability itself reacts to the dictates of other centers of superior power within the global system.

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